

# AESTHETICS AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Cheryl A. Foster



Ph.D.  
University of Edinburgh  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a philosophical perspective on a topic that enjoys interdisciplinary attention: the aesthetics of the natural environment. My observation is that most contemporary theories about the appreciation and evaluation of natural beauty rely on one of two models, the first based on art history and criticism, the second derivative of scientific categories and interpretations. I argue for a third approach, one that draws on philosophical issues in aesthetics, and develop it as an alternative to the art and science-based models.

Part 1 of the thesis attempts to remedy the neglect of contributions to the aesthetics of nature from the history of philosophy. The first two chapters demonstrate how Kant and Schopenhauer are particularly misrepresented with regard to natural beauty and in them I offer readings which are rich in their implications for aesthetic theory. Chapters Three and Four grow out of these implications, highlighting those issues discussed by Kant and Schopenhauer which are foundational to environmental aesthetics.

Part 2 of the thesis develops the points made explicit in Chapters Three and Four, using them as loose guidelines in structuring an approach to the aesthetics of nature which is bound by neither art nor science. Chapter Five examines the role of non-perceptual factors in aesthetic judgement; Chapter Six, ethical and other constraints on aesthetic appreciation. Chapter Seven clarifies the difference between aesthetic qualities (Sibley) and aesthetic properties (Mothersill) in order to defend the idea that aesthetic judgements are singular and not governed by rules or principles. Chapter Eight considers nature's multi-sensuousness as a way of discerning relevant aesthetic properties in the environment and takes as its model Andrew Brennan's ecological humanism. Finally, in Chapter Nine, I use the arguments of the previous chapters to analyse and criticise the art and science-based models of natural beauty, concluding that, while both models raise interesting and relevant issues, neither is comprehensive enough to represent the range of concerns in environmental aesthetics.



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I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work is my own.

12-12-92

Cheryl A. Foster

Date

## PREFACE

Many philosophers working in aesthetics promote the idea of its being an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. On the surface of the subject this is obviously true, since the very materials at the heart of aesthetic discourse are themselves the focus of other disciplines, like art history, music, architecture and literary theory. Furthermore, the *practice of activities* which inspire these subjects - activities like painting, performance, design and creative writing - thrives most vividly and confidently beyond the drier walls of academic consideration. For all that, it would be hasty to give up on aesthetics as, among other things, a challenging and lively branch of philosophy. Yet, when it comes to the aesthetic appreciation and assessment of the natural environment, this is precisely what some thinkers would have us do.

The opinions of these thinkers are usually limited to short essays, at times in the tone of a manifesto, urging creative cooperation between aestheticians and scholars beyond philosophical circles. This of course is no bad thing in itself; the case for it has been put most famously by Mary Carman Rose in her article, 'Nature as Aesthetic Object: An Essay in Meta-Aesthetics'. (*British Journal of Aesthetics*, 16(1): 3-13, 1976)

Indeed, a glance at a list of contributors to the literature of environmental aesthetics reveals a decidedly cross-disciplinary cast of characters: Jay Appleton and Yi-Fu Tuan (geographers), Yrjö Sepänmaa (comparative literature), Neil Evernden and Haig Khatchadourian (environmental ethics), René Dubos (biologist), and the many dozens of tourist boards, wilderness foundations and environmental protection agencies which have, over the years, given less academic formulations of nature's aesthetic impact. In addition to this, some philosophers specialising in the aesthetics of nature, most notably Allen Carlson of the University of Alberta, themselves support a programme of interdisciplinary research, to the point of subordinating the peculiarly *aesthetic* or *philosophical* dimension of the topic to other considerations, like those found in ecology or the natural sciences.

[T]his knowledge, essentially common sense/scientific knowledge, seems to me the only viable candidate for playing the role in regard to the appreciation of nature, which our knowledge of art, artistic traditions and the like plays in regard to the appreciation of art. (From 'Appreciation and the Natural Environment' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 37(3): 267-275, Spring 1979, p. 273)

One of the problems with Carlson's claim - I shall discuss it and other problems throughout the thesis - is its lack of an explicit rendering of the *kind* of connection he envisions between the natural sciences and aesthetic responsiveness. Is it causal? Educative? Associational? Carlson never



really says. Yet, it's easy to understand his taking this approach - what I call the 'scientific model of appreciation' - because the only alternative, barring a few exceptions, is to subsume the aesthetic appreciation of nature under categories of art criticism and history, categories ill-suited to enhance a genuine understanding of *nature's* beauty. In fact, most contemporary accounts of nature's beauty cling magnetically to one pole or the other: either the aesthetic power of nature emerges by analogy or in association with art and its concomitant history and criticism; or, nature's beauty is seen to be properly understood only in deference to scientific knowledge or hypotheses. This seems inadequate because neither approach can fully articulate the relationship between natural beauty and ourselves, the beings who encounter it. Art-based models of appreciation ignore the kind of thing the natural environment *is* - a non-artefactual, multi-sensuous *place* full of non-human objects, communities, events and processes. Scientific models of appreciation fail to consider the kind of creatures *we are* - individuals capable of apprehending beauty and feeling pleasure independently of cognitive coercion or predictable cause.

Furthermore, contemporary theories about natural beauty neglect more than philosophical method. They often fail to account accurately for contributions from thinkers in the history of philosophy. Of course, there is abundant scholarship of excellent quality on any number of philosophers who have written, in one way or another, about natural beauty. Yet, it is my impression that we haven't yet got them into proper focus: just because someone writes about natural beauty doesn't mean their ideas are still relevant to *contemporary* debates. Archibald Alison, for example, writes comprehensively and well about a certain kind of response to nature but his theory is too dependent on the imaginative reverie of human beings, to be truly about a response to the non-human environment. This is especially true in an age when environmental philosophy emphasises the independence of other communities from our human interests.

Francis Hutcheson also cites many instances of natural beauty in his work but his theory proposes ideal standards for *objects*, rather than a broad theory about the natural environment as such. Shaftesbury's nature is too empowered by God, Hegel's, by (human) spirit ; and Addison's ideas, while eloquent and inspiring, are not systematic in a way that brings a strong *philosophical* tone to the topic. Burke is, in many ways, the best pre-nineteenth century candidate for consideration but, because many of his ideas are taken up and developed more fully by Kant, it seems more fruitful to centre on Kant and refer to Burke where relevant. For this reason, my thesis begins with an extended account of Kant's attitudes towards natural beauty - but indeed, that is only a beginning.

When thinkers from the history of philosophy have been invoked, their theories have often been misrepresented with regard to nature and its beauty. This is most true of Kant, who has been

supposed, incorrectly, to prefer natural to artistic beauty on aesthetic grounds. Conversely, Schopenhauer, whose work in aesthetics has been dismissed as too metaphysical, offers compelling but neglected insights into the environmental character of nature's beauty. A reinterpretation of Kant and Schopenhauer on natural beauty not only clarifies their place within contemporary discourse but also reorients that discourse towards more philosophical, specifically aesthetic frameworks, which are conspicuously absent from current work in the field. Here, I offer an approach to these frameworks by isolating the ideas of Kant and Schopenhauer that have relevance to environmental aesthetics, and then using those ideas to organise my discussion about more contemporary aesthetic issues in relation to nature.

The shape of the thesis is more conical than anything else. Topics explored in great detail and depth in the first third of the discussion come up again and again, but increasingly they appear in conjunction with other considerations to the point where their influence is far-reaching but diffuse. In Part 1 the discussion begins with a sharply focused analysis of Kant and Schopenhauer as they have been, and then should be, interpreted with respect to natural beauty. From there the aperture widens to consider, in succession, issues raised by Kant and Schopenhauer that have potent but neglected significance for environmental aesthetics. These topics are not only about natural beauty but about aesthetic practice generally, and I examine them in detail as a prelude to the rest of the thesis. Because, again, environmental aesthetics is an *interdisciplinary* endeavour, the issues raised by Kant and Schopenhauer bring to light a specifically philosophical dimension of the subject. These issues, which bind the entire thesis together, are: the sublimely aesthetic relationship between observer and environment; the neglected senses in aesthetic apprehension; the non-scientific, non-logical character of aesthetic judgement; art's capacity for non-discursive communication; and shifts in appreciative perception as they occur between nature and art. After an extended explication and analysis of these issues, I proceed to Part 2, where the contributions of Kant and Schopenhauer become guiding themes for each chapter.

The second part of the thesis begins with an account of shifts in appreciative perception insofar as they have been used to make claims about nature's 'naturalness' and its importance to aesthetic judgements. This leads to a broader exploration of judgement, where I defend the non-scientific and non-logical approach promoted by Kant and Schopenhauer in the context of contemporary aesthetic theory. Following this, I develop ideas about beauty and pleasure, before extending them further in discussion about aesthetic relations and judgements in respect of nature. Finally, I analyse the two most prominent theories about environmental aesthetics - the scientific model of appreciation, and the art-based model of appreciation - in light of conclusions reached in the previous chapters. This last chapter is intended not only as a critique of currently popular methods but also as a commentary about what philosophical considerations should be at the centre of

environmental-aesthetic discourse. In the words of Schiller,

Philosophy itself, which first seduced us from our allegiance to Nature, is now in loud and urgent tones calling us back to her bosom. How is it, then, that we still remain Barbarians? (Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Wilkinson and Willoughby (Clarendon 1985), Letter 4, pp. 50-51)

Philosophy does not have a perfect answer for each of the many and diverse questions society now asks about the natural environment. My intention here is to suggest an approach to environmental aesthetics which sacrifices neither philosophical rigour nor the uniquely sensuous depth of nature. In seeking this approach - not so much a theory of natural beauty as some thoughts about the beginnings of one - I have come to rely again and again on those ideas raised, so eloquently and extensively, in the major aesthetic works of Kant and Schopenhauer. Their ideas govern, in a subtle rather than overt way, considerations of a most urgent necessity to contemporary environmental aesthetics . Not ethics. Not science. And not even the philosophy of art. *Aesthetics*. Should our interdisciplinarily good intentions cause us to lose our foothold, our focus, in philosophical aesthetics, a grasp of Kant and Schopenhauer might well give us back that discipline we hoped to invoke in the first place.



## PART 1

### CHAPTER ONE KANT: MISINTERPRETATIONS

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Kant's *Critique of Judgement* contains many ideas of relevance to contemporary discussions in the aesthetics of the natural environment, as does Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*.<sup>1</sup> Both works, however, stand in need of clarification before their relevance can be made manifest. In the case of Kant, the claim that he prefers natural to artistic beauty for *aesthetic* reasons is misguided and must be reinterpreted in light of moral considerations. In Schopenhauer, a metaphysical framework emphasising Ideas in aesthetic apprehension obscures a contradictory but compelling subtext about nature, one which yields an empirical analysis of beauty that is conducive to the less metaphysical approaches of much contemporary environmental philosophy. This subtext emerges as a "missed interpretation" of Schopenhauer's thought, adding considerable weight to a theory which, on its more conventional reading, already yields several important insights into aesthetic practice generally. Conversely, Kant's apparently aesthetic preference for nature turns out to be moral. This leads to the judgement that many claims about Kant's position on natural beauty are "misinterpretations" of his assertions. However, these misinterpretations don't pose a problem for interdisciplinary environmental aesthetics (even if it seems that we are losing what many thought was philosophical validation for nature's particular beauty). The misplaced focus on Kant's alleged preference has led discussion of his aesthetic theory down the wrong path, leaving unexplored many other worthwhile aspects of the *Critique of Judgement*.

It is my intention, once the misinterpretation and missed interpretation have been elucidated, to argue for those aspects of Kant and Schopenhauer which have critical implications for aesthetics and criticism as they pertain to natural beauty, implications which I proceed to accept by suggesting a set of environmental-aesthetic guidelines based loosely on the issues raised by Kant and Schopenhauer.

## II. KANT'S PREFERENCE FOR NATURAL BEAUTY

### 1. Examples of Contemporary Misinterpretation

In his book *Death of the Soul*, William Barrett notes that Kant considers human nature from two points of view: man as moral agent and man as offspring of a nonmoral universe. The *Critique of Pure Reason* explores possibilities for theoretical knowledge about this nonmoral universe and, 'just as Kant had been the first philosopher to grasp the scientific and intellectual significance of modern science as method and concept, now he must go on to articulate its human consequences in morals and aesthetics'.<sup>2</sup> The *Critique of Practical Reason* insures that the moral aspect of human nature finds a place within Kant's system but its complete removal from the jurisdiction of theoretical understanding pulls asunder any notion of unified cognitive experience. Understanding and reason do not, as a result of the first two *Critiques*, interfere with each other; the legislation of one has no influence over the operations of the other. '[S]till', Kant admits, 'the concept of freedom is meant to actualize in the sensible world the end proposed by its laws; and nature must consequently also be capable of being regarded in such a way that in the conformity to law of its form it at least harmonizes with the possibility of the ends to be effectuated in it according to the laws of freedom'. (CJ Introduction, II, 14) The modes of thought required for pure and practical reason do not intersect but Kant establishes a transition from one to the other by means of a non-legislative concept of unity which lies at the basis of that nature and suggests itself in natural forms.

Kant introduces a middle term between reason and understanding, *judgement* to 'contain, if not a special authority to prescribe laws, still a principle peculiar to itself upon which laws are sought, although one merely subjective *a priori*.' (CJ, Introduction, III, 15) Judgement does not have a field of objects over which it may exercise legislative authority but Kant supposes that it can still have some territory for which it alone is valid. Furthermore, Kant most often uses examples from the natural environment to illustrate judgement and its validity for everyone, and it is this sustained reference to nature which leads to much confusion about its particularly aesthetic status.

Most commentaries on Kant confront the aesthetic status of nature only fleetingly, insofar as they need to get on with the more crucial analysis of the theory of art and genius. Yet, many philosophers and other scholars have misread Kant regarding the position of natural beauty, claiming that he prefers it to that of art. The neglect of Kant's views on natural beauty by Kant scholars, coupled with an overzealous adoption of them (based on a misreading) by others, has resulted in an awkward trend. Those wishing to argue for the specific beauty of nature, the preservation of the natural environment or the inapplicability of Kant's views to art, all cite Kant's

theory to sanction their own claims. A few diverse examples illustrate the phenomenon.

William Barrett chastises philosophical aesthetics for concentrating exclusively on art but he identifies Kant as taking another approach.

Kant, on the contrary, insists that our deeper interest should be the experience of natural beauty *within nature*. For there our experience is surrounded by the awe, magnificence and wonder of the cosmos. The beautiful scene in nature is not only captivating to our senses, but also uplifting. It resonates with spiritual overtones that awaken our moral sentiment.<sup>3</sup>

Kant's approach to the 'deeper' interest in the beauty of nature grows out of his interest in the moral; his reasons for the interest are not aesthetic reasons. In addition, Barrett implies that the captivation of the senses is a legitimate part of the Kantian aesthetic but Kant explicitly dismisses the contribution of the non-visual and non-aural senses to aesthetic experience. Kant sticks to formalism in his account; sensuous variety is acknowledged but ultimately irrelevant.

Roger Scruton also insists that 'it is only in the experience of nature, Kant suggests, that we grasp the relation of our faculties to the world.'<sup>4</sup> Maybe so, but this doesn't warrant his conclusion that 'Kant valued art less than nature.'<sup>5</sup> It cannot be said without qualification that Kant values art less than nature, especially in the realm of aesthetics. Nature provides Kant with a straightforward context for the exercise of the judgement of taste but this does not rule out the legitimacy and perhaps superiority of judgements made in response to more complex objects.

Hegel of course attaches all questions of beauty to art - nature has no place in his philosophy of art because it has not been spiritualised. However, exaggeration of the difference between Kant and Hegel over nature has led to extreme claims about Kant's affinities, such as those made by Stephen Bungay in his work on Hegel's aesthetics. Bungay states that Kant asserts a 'twofold primacy of natural over artistic beauty.' Nature serves as the model for art (since art pleases when it takes after nature) and nature rules art through genius.<sup>6</sup> This is a less than probing summary of Kant's view but Bungay most likely includes this observation in order to underscore Hegel's radical departure from nature to art. 'For Hegel, nature's model is art; natural beauty is *"ein Reflex des dem Geiste angehorigen Schönen* - a reflex of the beauty which falls within the province of spirit.'<sup>8</sup> Clearly Kant's nature is not derivative of spirit or art in its beauty.

However, neither is Kant's art derivative of nature (another of Bungay's assertions). In 'Kant and Hegel on Aesthetics' Patrick Gardiner recognises that Kant's discussion of aesthetic ideas indicates that Kant had more in mind for art than the simple imitation of nature.<sup>8</sup> Aesthetic ideas

often yield a train of thought that nature cannot accomplish, a notion similar to Hegel's discussion of art as 'purifying' nature, though Hegel makes no reference to Kant in this regard. Hegel has taught us to read Kant's aesthetics anew but arguing for polar oppositions between Kant and Hegel only exacerbates the misunderstanding of Kant's position on natural beauty.

Kant thinks that the aesthetic experience of simple phenomena, such as some natural objects, helps us to understand judgements about fine art.<sup>9</sup> However, when thinking about the prominence of natural beauty in Kant's third *Critique*, one must keep in mind that Kant turns to natural objects because he needs to prove judgements of taste possible without a concept. Art presents potential dangers in this area, for a concept of what a thing is to be (or, in art, what medium it will occupy, at least), or what end it will serve, underlies the process of human creativity. Yet, to declare art as somehow inferior to natural beauty based on the presence of design distorts Kant's intentions. The *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, says Salim Kemal, 'examines rational and feeling man and his capacity for making judgements, and is unconcerned with the priority of one object over another.'<sup>10</sup>

Kant articulates the possibility of judgement in an indifferent world and his selection of natural objects reflects their conduciveness to a non-conceptual approach to this world. Furthermore, Kant insists on developing the moral component in his theory; nature has importance not only because it avoids the complexities of art experience in understanding the basis of aesthetic judgement but also because it suggests the idea of a supersensible ground of all experience. A close examination of Kant's ideas on both concepts and the supersensible reveals at once the root of the assumption that Kant has an aesthetic preference for nature and the evidence for showing that assumption to be mistaken.

## 2. Concepts: Free and Dependent Beauty

### (i)

One source of confusion in Kant's aesthetic theory is the distinction between free and dependent beauty, which many take to be parallel to a distinction between natural and artistic beauty. Hans-Georg Gadamer believes that 'the real intention of Kant's grounding of aesthetics is to dissolve the subordination of art to conceptual knowledge without at the same time eliminating the significant relation of art to conceptual understanding. Yet there is an undeniable weakness in Kant's distinction between artistic and natural beauty.'<sup>11</sup> Gadamer interprets Kant as describing



nature as "free" in judgements of taste because it does not represent anything. Art is conversely "dependent" due to its relatedness to a given concept, often linked to a representational purpose. This simple alliance of nature with free beauty, and art with dependent beauty, misconstrues Kant's reasoning.

In Section 16 of the third *Critique* Kant distinguishes between free and dependent beauties by attributing free beauty to the '(self-subsisting) beauties of this or that thing', and dependent beauty to the 'Object which comes under the concept of a particular end.' (CJ 16, 72) Note that Kant does not *define* free beauty as being natural or nonrepresentative. He ascribes free beauty to 'this or that thing', leaving flexible the application of the term. Shortly after these comments Kant proceeds to *illustrate* what free beauty might consist in; his use of mostly natural examples could well lead one to interpret nature as the paradigm for free beauty. Flowers, as free beauties of nature, are known to us not as the botanist classifies them but as forms which strike the eye immediately. Many birds and a number of crustacea exhibit free beauty in Kant's examples, as 'self-subsisting beauties which are not appurtenant to any object defined with respect to its end'. (CJ 16, 72) Where a concept of an end, which defines what a thing should be or should serve, enters into the estimation of an object's form, the judgement made about the form is not free. While such judgements, guided by intellectual classifications, prove necessary and useful for teaching (as outlined by Kant in his discussion of aesthetic ideas and the communication of rules in design), they must be distinguished from what Kant calls pure judgements of taste.

Kant also holds up foliage, designs *a la grecque* and their manifestations on wallpaper or frames as examples of free beauty. He includes as well all music that is not set to words. These are the notorious remarks that have led many astray in their reading of Kant. To take Kant literally and out of context about wallpaper and foliage leads to a trivialisation of aesthetics and promotes formalism at its most extreme.<sup>12</sup> Yet, many critics have done just this, using Kant's passing comments to justify an anachronistic endorsement of the abstract visual arts, and taking his illustrations as definitive regarding free beauty, where nature becomes the preferred object for pure judgements of taste. Thus Gadamer states that Kant's 'Analytic of the Beautiful' isn't sufficient for a proper art theory because free beauty takes nature as its model, nature and decorative art.<sup>13</sup> However, taking nature as a model does not prevent one from applying the idea of free beauty to a plethora of objects, natural or otherwise. Gadamer himself seems to acknowledge this in his earlier work *Truth and Method*. There, he admits that Kant knows one can look at one and the same thing in two different ways, placing the emphasis on the *approach of the observer* rather than on any inherent quality of the object itself.<sup>14</sup> This concurs with Kant's emphasis on the harmony of the subjective faculties in aesthetic judgement, where formal finality is felt in the sensation of that harmony (pleasure) rather than in the attribution of real finality to the object. I think that

speculation about what types of objects fall into what categories does little to promote understanding of Kant's position on natural beauty. The third *Critique* highlights the role of *judgement* in the play of our faculties and knowledge about free or dependent beauty will be gleaned most effectively from Kant's observations on the judging subject. Pure judgements of taste correspond to the individual's consciousness of an effect in the mind, an effect set off by external form but referential only to itself. This is why Kant denies the role of knowledge in pure aesthetic judgements: only the effect on the observing subject serves to unite the faculties and hence achieve freedom from conceptual dominance.

Free beauty, then, corresponds to the pure aesthetic judgement where no concept determines the nature of what is judged. Since art, as conscious creation, relies on an intentional (and often, conceptual) foundation in order to come into being, it might seem that Kant polarises art and nature along lines of dependent and free beauty. Certainly conceptual analysis enters into the estimation of great and complex works of art. Kant himself endows aesthetic ideas with a power of evolving extended trains of thought about an object. Still, there is no reason to think that one absolutely *must* judge a work of art conceptually, despite the appropriateness of such a method. Judgement about dependent beauty (of any kind) is qualified by reference to non-aesthetic considerations, while that about free beauty refers more straightforwardly to the effect of perceptual form. Mary McCloskey thinks that the distinction applies not to nature and art strictly but to cases where a difference of communicability arises. One object can be construed 'in different ways - as universally communicable of aesthetic ideas, and as beautiful.' <sup>15</sup>

Universal communicability *without* aesthetic ideas is possible because it emerges from the harmony between the subject's faculties - faculties possessed by everyone. It is universal because it rests on the ability to think at all, due to the subsumption of imagination under the faculty of concepts. Aesthetic ideas have the power of universal communicability due to their conceptual complexity, their ties to language. Such complexity belongs to art but nowhere does Kant mandate that art must be judged conceptually. Just as flowers may be judged conceptually (as specimens of a species or genus) or aesthetically (as beautiful forms), so may art too be judged aesthetically (as beautiful form) or conceptually (as the purveyor of aesthetic ideas, or perhaps by some other function). Conceptual judgements Kant calls impure judgements of taste. These stand in contrast to pure judgements, which focus only on the free beauty of perceptual form.

The difference between the attribution of free and dependent beauty does, in this light, refer to a potential difference between approaches used by an observing subject. Donald Crawford takes note of this in *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* : 'The distinction is not in terms of what is present; the distinction between free and dependent beauty is one concerning how the object is judged...the

main point concerns the kind of attention paid to the object.' <sup>16</sup> As acknowledged, Kant does use examples which tend to dichotomise nature and art in the analysis of free and dependent beauty but Crawford believes abstraction allows us to see that such a dichotomy simplifies the pure/impure distinction. Kant assumes that the two kinds of attention - that to an object's formal purposiveness, and that to the manifestation of conceptual characteristics - to be mutually exclusive, but the emphasis here is on the attention: the exclusiveness does not extend to categories of objects.

(ii)

The pure/impure distinction raises a curious issue: in the first three Moments of the 'Analytic of the Beautiful', Kant insists that no concept must mediate between the feeling of pleasure and the form of the object. If so, why does he contradict this by making room for a judgement of taste that allows for conceptual considerations? While conceptual considerations may or may not be appropriate to judgements about natural beauty, they must always be an option for the appreciation of art, if only by virtue of its history and genesis. Eva Schaper deduces that any move away from non-conceptual estimation violates the necessary conditions for aesthetic appraisals as outlined early in the third *Critique*. However, such a break may 'make room for a type of judgement that is not to be assessed by the standards of pure aesthetic appraisals.' <sup>17</sup> It is easy to imagine art-historical judgements fitting into this category. Then again, Kant does address conceptuality in aesthetics generally through the Antinomy of Taste: he arrives at the conclusion that, while judgements of taste have reference to a concept (one that defies sensible intuition), they can never be proved from a concept. Additionally, works of art refer, sometimes literally, to concepts, but their beauty cannot be deduced or proved by concepts. <sup>18</sup> I suspect that the notion of proof underlies Kant's rigorous denial of concepts early in the third *Critique*. If we take the role of concepts to be the *articulation* of an object's meaning, or place within a cultural context of appreciating and creating, rather than the arbitration of disputes about the truth of falsity or particular judgements, we do not need to dispense with dependent beauty or impure judgements of taste. After all, if Kant wished to eradicate conceptually-based estimations completely, he would never have evolved his theory of aesthetic ideas. The idea of dependent beauty leaves room within the judgement of taste for impure but nevertheless valid assessments based in part on concepts. The assessments may never be proved correct from concepts but this is a very different thing from banning conceptual relevance to interpretation altogether.

After an extended investigation of free and dependent beauty, Eva Schaper concludes that one must admit the falsity of supposing pure judgements of taste to be aesthetically preferable or more valuable than impure judgements of taste. <sup>19</sup> Still, a difficult problem arises from the ambiguous relationship between the ideas of "presupposing no concept", "not falling under the concept of a

particular end", and "representing nothing".<sup>20</sup> An object's perfection we may relate to the idea of "presupposing no concept". This differs from the idea of "not falling under the concept of a particular end": judgement about perfection pertains to the status of an object in comparison to its ideal *type* (as a formal or physical presence, or, in the case of human beings, a moral ideal as well), while judgement about a particular end corresponds to analysing the object in view of its specific *function, purpose* or *natural end*. All natural objects cited by Kant have natural ends or purposes within their ecosystems, purposes which are disregarded in pure aesthetic judgements.<sup>21</sup> 'If what makes some natural objects, for example flowers, freely beautiful is connected with the attitude we take up towards them, then there seems no reason why this should not hold for *all* natural objects.'<sup>22</sup> And, one may choose to see any item of nature as freely beautiful, or as dependent upon some other category if desired.

We must also ignore purpose even in arts or crafts designed for use. 'Decorative patterns have purposes as flowers or humming birds have, though in the context of human use rather than in nature's economy.'<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the requirements for free beauty in nature and in art are the same: 'appraising a manmade object as freely beautiful would be, as in the case of natural objects, appraising it with no regard to the concept of an end under which it may or may not fall, and *therefore* as representing nothing.' The skill or character of the depiction, illustration or imitation in a work of art is irrelevant to the question of the work's free beauty, as is the idea of its function or end.<sup>24</sup> What is relevant, though, is the attitude we take toward an object when judging it aesthetically. If the requirements for free beauty are the same for consideration of art and natural objects, then there is no reason to assert the superiority of one kind of object over another for judgements of taste. Besides, Kant does not promote the *superiority* of pure judgements of taste over impure judgements. This is evident from the fact that he uses examples of objects ( human beings; animals that we recognise; buildings with a specific function ) that immediately presuppose an end; with these objects, it is possible but not necessary to employ pure judgements of taste and the objects are not denigrated for having been judged in terms of dependent beauty. Kant gives every indication that the free/dependent distinction serves a functional purpose in judgement, rather than one of aesthetic privilege or ideology.

This distinction enables us to settle many disputes about beauty on the part of critics; for we may show them how one side is dealing with free beauty, and the other with that which is dependent: the former passing a pure judgement of taste, the latter one that is applied intentionally. (CJ 16, 74)

Thus, those who assert the superiority of natural beauty in Kant based on his account of free and dependent beauty cannot be correct. Also, the free/dependent beauty distinction cannot be used to justify the unique strength of natural beauty in aesthetic apprehension since both nature and art can



be viewed freely or dependently: the categories are flexible as are the objects within them. However, the idea of *appropriateness* concerning pure and impure judgements of taste provides an interesting perspective from which to consider the assumptions beneath certain contemporary aesthetic theories. I shall return to the topics of concepts, representation and cultural context throughout my discussion, since an understanding of their role within aesthetic judgement determines what kinds of critical considerations might apply to art but not to nature.

### 3. Formal Finality: Expression and the Supersensible

#### (i)

Another point of misinterpretation about Kant's aesthetic theory is the significance of formal finality. Objects of beauty appear to have a purpose but do not in actuality serve ends: purposiveness without purpose. Natural objects convey this finality most purely since they have not been designed or created by human beings to serve a human end. Nor do we equate the natural *function* of an object with aesthetic purposiveness. Objects of beauty are, in principle, appreciated in virtue of their appearance and not their actuality, whatever that may be.

Formal finality is estimated by a feeling of pleasure or displeasure, while real finality is estimated by concepts. By grounding his aesthetic theory on a judgement of taste which is empirically non-universal but *a priori* universal, Kant is able to deny the significance of taste for knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Not only must conceptual justification of an object's aesthetic merit be banned from the pure judgement of taste; to sustain the response to free beauty (or the free response to beauty, more accurately), we must entertain purposiveness without a foray into purpose, finality without recourse to the concept of an end.

Kant feels that nature, in the beauty of its forms, has a capacity for 'originating in free activity aesthetically final forms, independently of any particular guiding ends'. (CJ 58, 219) Paul Guyer sees this idea as nothing more than a superficial acknowledgement that nature adapts itself to our need for regularity. By supposing nature's forms to agree with the principle of reflective judgement, we do no more than promote a 'self-serving delusion that nature is systematic.'<sup>26</sup> I agree with Guyer here - a cursory reading of Kant's account of the sublime is enough to recognise that nature's pleasant forms share the planet with vast instances of formless horror. Kant's somewhat selective elevation of nature's ability to induce pleasure through beautiful forms stands in contrast to his dislike of formlessness and his praise for our heroic virtue in overcoming its

threat in the sublime judgement.

A further problem with Kant's finality of beautiful forms emerges when we consider that, related to the finality of natural forms, is the concept of expression. Artistic 'beauty' expresses aesthetic ideas, though these are excited by means of a concept. Natural beauty expresses not aesthetic ideas but rather something more vague and self-referential. In Section 51 Kant observes, 'with the beauty of nature the bare reflection upon a given intuition, apart from any concept of what the object is intended to be, is sufficient for awakening and communicating the idea of which that Object is regarded as the *expression* .' (CJ 51, 184) Salim Kemal thinks that Kant fails to justify "expression";<sup>27</sup> Gadamer surmises, 'it is obvious that what natural beauty expresses is particularly indeterminate.'<sup>28</sup> These claims would be justified if one were perhaps looking for an intention behind expression or a sense of unified, symbolic reference. However, if we consider expression from the viewpoint established by Kant, then it certainly refers, in the context of natural beauty, to the supersensible ground of experience.

Nature's formal finality in all natural beauties expresses the same idea - 'it is the indeterminate idea of the supersensible in general'.<sup>29</sup> Natural forms seem designed for our cognition and they seem to express the harmony of our faculties with the world as presented; art expresses this same idea symbolically, as the formal ordering of nature. Kant asks in Section 30, about 'How we are to explain why nature has scattered beauty abroad with so lavish a hand, even in the depth of the ocean where it can seldom be reached by the eye of man - for which it alone is final.' (CJ 30, 133) Kant's 'finality' may express, more than anything (as Guyer suggests), our feeling of, or desire for, unity with the cosmos. But, this desire as portrayed by Kant has consequences for his aesthetic theory. Kant turns the formal finality of natural objects into evidence for the correspondence of it with the moral capacity of human beings.

(ii)

In conceiving of a finality (through the play of our cognitive powers in response to natural forms) that cannot be demonstrated, Kant claims that mind becomes aware of its ability to transcend nature and to reach something beyond itself and the world that it structures categorically.<sup>30</sup>

The beautiful forms displayed in the organic world all plead eloquently on the side of the realism of the aesthetic finality of nature in support of the plausible assumption that beneath the production of the beautiful there must lie a preconceived idea in the producing cause - that is to say an *end* acting in the interest of our imagination. (CJ 58, 216 - 217)

Kant takes the apparent finality of nature's forms as an indication of something more than a mysterious correspondence between human beings and the things in the world. An immediate interest in the beautiful things of nature 'is always a mark of a good soul; and that, where this interest is habitual, it is at least indicative of a temper of mind favourable to the moral feeling that it should readily associate itself with the *contemplation of nature*.' (CJ 42, 157) This interest focuses not on nature's sensuous charms but on form only; yet Kant introduces an ambiguity regarding form. He expressly states that he refers 'strictly to the beautiful *forms* of nature', as opposed to its charms, but soon thereafter he claims that an immediate interest in the beauty of nature is 'in fact intellectual...This means that he is not alone pleased with nature's product in respect to form, but is also pleased at its existence'. (CJ 42, 158) The *immediacy* of the interest has nothing to do with the specifically formal aspect of nature's presentation. Rather, the interest taken is concerned with the *existence of forms* instead of a particular form itself. The interest in the existence of forms in nature allows Kant to draw attention to the relationship between morality and the appreciation of beauty. The interpretation of this relationship poses yet more problems for the allegedly superior status of natural beauty in Kant's third *Critique*.

Nature does not present objects for the purpose of delighting human beings. We do not create the objects, though in some way their presentation corresponds in a pleasing manner with our mode of reception. This correspondence leads to the idea that nature's forms appear suited to human ends in the world, a world that often displays indifference to our needs. Pleasurable judgement bridges the gap between theoretical understanding of the world's scientific mechanism and the moral reasoning we employ in matters of our own freedom. When encountering the beauty of nature, we are aware that the pleasing forms have not been designed by - or cannot in any case be *shown* to have been designed by - a free conscious agent for our enjoyment. Still, such forms exist and we take delight in their appearance. Kant couples this delight with immediate interest in those persons who are either trained in moral thinking or susceptible to it. This is because the finality we meet with in the beauty of nature - a finality without an end - can be found in only one other place in our experience, and that is in ourselves, in our own moral destiny. Just as moral laws are represented as universally applicable to all persons, so is the pleasure inherent in aesthetic judgement imputed as intersubjectively universal to all who judge. Therefore, Kant's analogy between the judgement of taste and morality springs from their shared claims to universality and the finality involved in mere estimation for both cases. Such an analogy has little to do with the process of appreciation for its own sake; it serves to validate the feeling of lawfulness we have about our moral prescriptions, a tenuous feeling in the context of a mechanistic universe.

Kant knows that his analogy is strained and seeks to make it more palatable by admitting that the immediate interest in natural beauty is not common, but peculiar to those who already possess

a disposition susceptible to moral ideas. He also anticipates the objection that an object of nature interests in virtue of its beauty only insofar as a moral idea 'is brought into partnership therewith. But it is not the object that is of immediate interest but rather the inherent character of the beauty qualifying it for such a partnership - a character, therefore, that belongs to the very essence of beauty.' (CJ 42, 161) However, this appears to retract a claim he makes earlier, namely, that the immediate interest in natural beauty is 'in fact intellectual' and that it pleases not only because of its form but because of its very existence. (CJ 42, 158) Kant is equivocal over whether it is the *object* and its existence, or the *form of* that object, which arouses an *immediate* interest. If immediacy characterised the favourable judgement of the form of the object, then we might indeed have some evidence of a special aesthetic power of natural beauty. However, it seems more likely that the immediacy pertains to the interest in the existence of such a form, suggesting as it does some link between ourselves and the universe. The latter view is justified by the degree to which Kant develops the relationship between morality and aesthetic appreciation.<sup>31</sup>

In Section 59, Kant outlines the character of the partnership between the beautiful and the moral. Both please immediately (beauty in intuition, morality in conception); both please apart from a preceding interest (moral pleasure is bound up with an interest but one that judgement calls into being); freedom is exhibited in the estimation of both (freedom of the imagination in accordance with understanding's conformity to law, for beauty; freedom of will in harmony with understanding in accordance with the ideas of reason, for morality); and both make their judgements universal (beauty by subjective principle; morality by a universal concept). The inherent character of beauty that qualifies it for partnership with the moral is its power to represent 'the imagination, even in its freedom, as amenable to a final determination for understanding, and teaches us to find, even in sensuous objects, a free delight apart from any charm of sense.' (CJ, 59, 225) The mind, by becoming conscious of 'a certain ennoblement and elevation above mere sensibility to pleasure from impressions of sense', entertains beauty as a symbol of morality due to the reference 'to something in the Subject itself and outside it, and which is not nature, nor yet freedom, but still connected with the ground of the latter, i.e., the supersensible'. (CJ 59, 224) The transcendence of nature's charms indicates just how far from experienced nature Kant is, for surely one of the most compelling aspects of the natural environment is its multi-sensuous texture and variety.

Kant builds his definition of beauty as a symbol of morality on an analogy which involves 'transferring the reflection upon an object of intuition to quite a new concept, and one with which perhaps no intuition could ever directly correspond.' (CJ 59,223) The particularly *natural* origin of such beauty is crucial to the analogy, for art can please immediately only by resembling nature so closely as to be taken for it, or by presenting forms obviously directed at our delight (but immediate interest in that case would be in the form and not the existence of the object). The



beauty of nature, as a symbol of morality, suggests that the world is conducive to the freedom of human beings (an object with which we had nothing to do in creation nevertheless pleases us - how could that be?). A free interest is taken in the beauty of nature and the pleasure we feel in the estimation of natural beauty originates in nothing other than the play of the cognitive faculties in the estimation of an object which we didn't put there! And, the natural forms please without a concept - without knowledge of function - and the very possibility of this happening opens avenues for considering the freedom of human beings to exercise their will in the world. So, it does appear that natural beauty is particularly powerful in calling up ideas of our moral destiny.

However, the aesthetic dimension of nature's beauty is secondary to its being *of nature*: the form of the object is like a stepping stone to higher things, a device which initiates a type of reflection quite unconcerned with the appearance of the object itself. Art may present equally beautiful forms but it doesn't provide Kant with the basis for the analogy he needs to reinforce the theoretical possibility of moral freedom in a mechanistic universe.

Of course, an interest in nature doesn't entail a moral interest or mark out a morally good person; but habitual interest indicates a frame of mind suited to the moral, for it involves the contemplation of nature's formal finality for humans. Beauty symbolises morality because 'the experience of the beautiful is a result of ourselves legislating a principle that determines how we experience the world...our legislation appears to be effective in the sensible world'.<sup>32</sup>

Again, if we emphasise the principle of legislation in the analogy with morality, it becomes necessary to overlook the specific sensuous impact of the object itself. Kant tethers the validity of our aesthetic response to nature to the seriousness of our moral attitudes.<sup>33</sup> Yet, he does define symbol as the sensuous intuition to which a concept, incapable of being grasped in a sensuous intuition, applies itself. The sensuous aspect of the symbol must have some importance, though Kant carefully stresses that 'what agrees with the concept is merely the rule of this procedure, and not the intuition itself.' (CJ 59, 222) In this light, natural objects are given precedence over art for reasons *other than* their aesthetic merit. The rule of reflection for natural beauty, judged freely, does not rely on a constitutive concept, and it is an exemplary judgement. These factors parallel the rule of reflection for moral reasoning and in doing so elevate natural beauty to a special position in the *Critique of Judgement*. Clearly, the elevation has nothing whatsoever to do with the particularly sensuous manifestations of the objects themselves, i.e., their aesthetic character.

(iii)

Salim Kemal has explored the aesthetic ambiguity present in Kant's account of natural beauty

as symbolic of the moral, and his discoveries are worth noting here. Natural beauty, claims Kemal, supports moral behaviour by exhibiting the possibility that we can act in hope of achieving a moral end in the world, a world not entirely indifferent to our moral aspirations. The analogy between judgements of beauty and morality may hold for this reason but the specifically aesthetic dimension of nature is secondary to the analogy. In addition, art bears a better symbolic relation to the moral than nature does, for art expresses the essence of moral *activity* as the balance between nature and reason, as the literal shaping of the world according to ideas. Kant often insists that fine art must be like nature to be judged beautiful and to incur immediate interest, but this means that it is the support a thing gives to morality that is fundamental and constitutive of our experience of beauty. Kemal considers this an aberration of Kant's own aesthetic theory, for if a moral interest determines our judgement of beauty or serves as its end, then the requirement of disinterestedness (for pure judgements) is contravened, and Kant makes it clear that the apprehension of natural beauty must be disinterested to uphold the analogy with the moral.

By contrast, if beauty is to bear a symbolic relation to morality then surely the subordination of nature to reason must play a part in that relation. The notion of subordination implies the freedom of human ideas over instinct or the materials of nature. Furthermore, natural beauty is said to be important because it appears to be designed, like art, with freedom and a rational will at its base. While Kant does not support a genuine teleology of nature, the metaphors he uses to explain the aesthetic finality of natural forms are germane to art. Because of this, says Kemal, one must understand fine art in order to understand aesthetic activity at all. Our experience of natural beauty will be circumscribed by art, though the two sorts of objects are not reducible to each other. Natural beauty exhibits the balance of nature and reason from the side of nature, showing that nature can enter into relation with reason. Fine art participates in the relation from the side of reason, exhibiting reason's part in the subordination of nature. While we must understand art to understand our experience of beauty at all in Kant, the two are nevertheless different and valuable in their own ways.<sup>34</sup> Kemal's conclusions about the circumscribing of nature by art do not, to my mind, apply to aesthetics generally but are instead an accurate interpretation of Kant's theory and its consequences.

(iv)

Art expresses the efficacy of moral ideas in sensuous form; nature promotes the contemplation of moral ideas. Kant underscores the importance of the process of reflection when constructing his analogy between natural beauty and morality but I think Kemal is correct in noting that the analogy undermines Kant's own requirements for a pure aesthetic judgement, and that art provides a tangible symbol not of the process of reflection but of the *results* of that reflection willed into the

world. Kant himself calls on the design metaphor to elevate natural beauty. Gadamer, however, sees that, as a result of that metaphor, 'the moral interest in natural beauty that Kant had so enthusiastically described now retreats behind the self-encounter of man in works of art.' <sup>35</sup>

Our conception of nature as aimless mechanism is extended by the conception of 'nature regarded after the analogy of art. Hence it gives a veritable extension, not, of course, to our knowledge of Objects of nature, but to our conception of nature itself - nature as mere mechanism being enlarged to the conception of nature as art'. (CJ 23, 92) To augment this, Kant provides a now famous comparison between nature and art, as mutually referential but not equally reciprocal.

Nature proved beautiful when it wore the appearance of art; and art can only be termed beautiful, where we are conscious of its being art, while yet it has the appearance of nature. (CJ 45, 167)

Art is like nature in appearing to be unintentional and free from the ascription of rules, yet we must recognise it as art: its apparent freedom from rules gives it that quality of free beauty. Nature is like art in seeming to be formed intentionally and with regard for human ends; it seems designed. Art, we assume, is designed and intentional but when beautiful it appears free from laboured effect or effort. Natural forms, in contrast, can be of very artistic appearance, pleading for the assumption that 'beneath the production of the beautiful there must lie a preconceived idea in the producing cause'. (CJ 58, 216)

In general, natural and artistic beauty have some subjective affinity between them, as is shown when our description of the one refers to aspects of the other. However, for Kant, nature's particular beauty is not of aesthetic consequence: in both formal exactness and reference to the idea of a producing cause, it is simply a cognitive gateway to higher things. The unique and separate character of natural beauty *qua* natural is never developed in the *Critique of Judgement*. Natural beauty is valued for its facilitation of a judgement that is analogically the same as moral judgement, for its being easily appreciated without a concept, and for its indication of the supersensible ground of experience, but it ultimately depends on familiarity with art and art production for its importance in Kant's theory.

So, assertions like those of Gadamer - 'Kant...emphasises primarily the advantage of natural over artistic beauty' <sup>36</sup> - must be understood as referring *not* to Kant's preference for nature's aesthetic merits but to nature's symbolic reflection of human moral freedom. Taken in tandem with the clarified distinction between free and dependent beauty, this conclusion forces us to abandon any hope of invoking Kant as the patron saint of natural beauty : such beauty possesses no uniquely aesthetic distinction in the third *Critique*. Having said that, I hope to establish that

discussions about natural beauty can be better served by shifting our focus in Kant, away from misguided allegations about his preference for nature and towards other aspects of his system which have implications for the practice of aesthetics generally. Before doing so, I shall turn to Schopenhauer: his theory, more so than Kant's, takes account of the specifically aesthetic aspects of the natural environment, albeit in a rather covert manner.



## NOTES - CHAPTER ONE

- 1 I shall be using the following translations of these works: Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford University Press, 1986); Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* trans. E.F.J. Payne (Dover Publications 1969), volumes 1 and 2; and also Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Metaphysics of the Beautiful and Aesthetics' in *Parerga and Paralipomena* Trans. E.F.J. Payne (Clarendon, 1974). References to these works will be cited in the text, including CJ for the 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgement'; WWRI and WWR II for *The World as Will* vols. 1 and 2; OMB for 'On the Metaphysics of the Beautiful and Aesthetics'; followed by a section number and by the page number.
- 2 William Barrett, *Death of the Soul* (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 91-92.
- 3 Ibid., p.97. Barrett adds on page 100, '...it would be a pity if philosophers of the beautiful were to restrict their attention only to human artifacts, works of art.'
- 4 Roger Scruton, *Kant* (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 80.
- 5 Ibid., p.85.
- 6 Stephen Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Clarendon, 1987), p. 14.
- 7 Ibid., p. 15.
- 8 Patrick Gardiner, 'Kant and Hegel on Aesthetics' in *Hegel's Critique of Kant* ed. Stephen Priest (Clarendon, 1987), p. 169.
- 9 Mary McCloskey, *Kant's Aesthetic* (Macmillan, 1987), p.7.
- 10 Selim Kemal, *Kant and Fine Art* (Clarendon, 1986), p. 11. Kemal argues at length for the further view that art circumscribes nature in the third *Critique*.
- 11 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 164.
- 12 Eva Schaper, *Studies in Kant's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh University Press, 1979), p.78.
- 13 Gadamer, *Relevance*, p.161.
- 14 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Sheed and Ward, Ltd., 1975), p. 43.
- 15 McCloskey, p. 131.
- 16 Donald Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), pp. 14-15.
- 17 Schaper, p. 81.
- 18 Mary Mothersill has used Kant's antinomy to formulate her own approach to critical judgement: her first thesis states that there are no laws of taste (no concepts for proving or deducing judgements); her second thesis asserts that there nevertheless are genuine

judgements of taste (they are based on concepts or have reference to properties). Kant, she claims, recognises that the thesis and antithesis of his antinomy lead to a new field of enquiry - aesthetics - when taken together. See Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 210.

- 19 Schaper, p. 83.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid., p. 86.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., p. 89.
- 24 Paul Guyer points out that Kant's examples imply two ways in which an object may be judged in terms of dependent beauty: for natural or artificial objects, any consideration of purpose or function renders the judgement impure; while for artificial objects only, the consideration of semantic or symbolic content as referring to events, objects or topics beyond the work, also constitutes an impure judgement. Yet, to judge in terms of expressive illustration or symbolic reference differs greatly from judging against an object's function or purpose in serving an end. Furthermore, the accuracy of mimesis or the clarity of expression need not enter into the estimation of a work's formal beauty. Therefore, concludes Guyer, beauty and representation may be compatible but distinctive features in a work of art. Just because a work represents a specific scene or event in symbolic terms does not exclude it from being judged as freely beautiful - its accuracy as depiction may be ignored. Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Harvard University Press, 1979).
- 25 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 40.
- 26 Guyer, p. 47.
- 27 Kemal, p. 269.
- 28 Gadamer, *Relevance*, p. 30.
- 29 Crawford, p. 134.
- 30 Schaper, p. 131.
- 31 See Guyer in *Claims*, p. 368: 'Kant's view of the moral significance of interest in natural beauty rests on his thesis that aesthetic response itself can produce no interest in the existence of beautiful objects.'
- 32 Crawford, p. 158.
- 33 Barrett, p. 101.
- 34 Kemal - extended treatment of this topic can be found on pp. 12-35.
- 35 Gadamer, *Truth*, p. 53.
- 36 Ibid., p. 46.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MISSED INTERPRETATIONS: SCHOPENHAUER ON NATURAL BEAUTY

#### I. THE TRANSITION FROM KANT

Schopenhauer, in contrast to Kant, is rarely cited in support of positions in environmental aesthetics.<sup>1</sup> This makes sense since virtually everything written about Schopenhauer's aesthetics takes for granted the total incorporation of his aesthetic theory in the metaphysical theory of Ideas. Clearly, Ideas bear little resemblance to nature's sensuous surface: Schopenhauer's account of them does little to enhance our understanding of the beauty of the natural environment taken *as* an environment. Yet, the metaphysical theory of Ideas does *not* exhaust Schopenhauer's views on aesthetics. Sprinkled among the obviously metaphysical passages are several empirical observations, and these observations differ from, and sometimes contradict, the metaphysical ones. The empirical observations form a subtext which is indeed relevant to the aesthetics of the natural environment. Before introducing this subject, I shall explain the foundation of Schopenhauer's metaphysical aesthetics (the relation of the pure subject to Ideas), and then explore a few of the problems internal to the Idea model of aesthetics itself, in order to make the power of the subtext all the more apparent.

#### II. THE AESTHETIC INADEQUACY OF IDEAS

##### 1. Problems in Schopenhauer's Metaphysical Aesthetics

###### (i)

Schopenhauer thinks that Kant's merit in the area of aesthetics '...does not really extend much farther than his having shown the right path, and having given, by a provisional attempt, an example of how, roughly, we must follow it.' (WWR I, Appendix, 530) For his own provisional attempt, Schopenhauer retains Kant's noumenon/phenomenon distinction but with the proviso that we do indeed have access to the noumenal thing-in-itself. Furthermore, aesthetic experience in Schopenhauer has a metaphysical foundation: unlike Kant's critique on taste and subjectivity, Schopenhauer's account of beauty involves knowledge, albeit of a non-discursive sort. This unique knowledge, however, gives rise to an ambiguity in Schopenhauer's treatment of aesthetic

experience, one that has consequences for our understanding of natural beauty in particular.

Schopenhauer makes the claim that knowledge in ordinary experience differs from that to which we lay claim in aesthetic experience (in substantiating this Schopenhauer continually subordinates the variety of aesthetic effects to the unity of Ideas, leading to an apparent preference for the beauty of art, which *facilitates* apprehension of the Ideas, over the beauty of nature). In aesthetic consciousness, one enters into a new way of experiencing representations. The distinction between subject and object no longer holds, and the conditions of ordinary consciousness are transcended.

Ordinary consciousness is characterised by four specific dimensions of experience: (1) one regards oneself as an individual with a particular body in a world of experienced objects; (2) one finds objects in one's midst 'interesting' in relation to will; (3) practical interest moulds and 'falsifies' the way we see objects; (4) consciousness is suffering, agitated, anxious or preoccupied.<sup>2</sup> When we no longer need to control an object, or see it in relation to our interests, we are in a state conducive to aesthetic experience (of course one rarely gets to that state, according to Schopenhauer!). The perceiving subject no longer has a sense of herself or himself as an individual and the object perceived no longer has the particularity of a thing. The transformation of the subject and object in aesthetic consciousness provides a temporary respite from the struggle of Will.

Having relinquished the ordinary way of experiencing things, the subject rests in fixed contemplation of the object presented to it. They do not consider the when, the why or the whither of the object; they dwell solely in the what. (WWR I, 34, 178) Raised up by the power of mind, I devote myself to perception and, sinking completely into perception, forget myself. Schopenhauer abolishes the individual from aesthetic consciousness: as an individual observer, one is concerned with relations but as the pure subject of knowing 'he is *all things* , in so far as he perceives them, and in him their existence is without burden or hardship.' (WWR II, 66, 371) The pure subject of knowing sees things objectively (without the influence of will through personal desire or appetite) and every objective apprehension 'is an expression more of the true nature of life and existence, more an answer to the question "What is life?" than any rational explication of the universe'. (WWR II, xxxiv, 406)

Schopenhauer maintains that there is an absolute difference between the objects of aesthetic and non-aesthetic consciousness. In the latter, the relation of the reasonable or desirous individual to the world remains intact, whereas in the former the principle of sufficient reason has no place. A scientist or woodcutter might look at a tree and see something which can be described as



occupying a certain spatial area, with certain dimensions, being of a certain age or certain texture; but the pure subject of knowing does not decipher a tree in these terms.<sup>3</sup> In calling an object beautiful, we imply two things: one, that at the sight of the thing we cease to be conscious of ourselves as individuals but as pure subjects; two, that we recognise not the individual object but the Idea of the tree. (WWR I, 41, 209) The object of aesthetic awareness passes out of relation to something else, as in normal perception, and assumes eternal form, the Idea, the immediate objectivity of the Will at a particular grade. The individual knows particular things. The pure subject of knowing knows only Ideas.

(ii)

The most basic form of knowledge is 'being object for a subject'. Particular objects are known relationally and Will cannot be directly encountered at all. Ideas stand at a point between Will and ordinary objects: they enter representation in being known by a subject (the pure subject of knowing) but they do not enter into the principle of sufficient reason. Ideas differ from Will only by virtue of their being representation. They are, in any case, the most adequate objectivity of Will and the only direct one. Furthermore, the Idea is absolutely perceptive 'and although representing an infinite number of individual things, is yet thoroughly definite.' (WWR I, 49, 234) Ideas fall into plurality through the principle of sufficient reason, dispersed through an infinite number of objects in the world, yet remain in themselves whole and undivided. The unity of Ideas, dispersed into plurality by the form of an individual's knowledge, can be known aesthetically. A restored but altered unity - one that lacks the perceptibility and distinctness of the Idea - can be constructed abstractly in the concept. Concepts link only phenomenal relations but Ideas link Will and phenomena. To understand how a single, plurality-less Will is to be related to a world of changing phenomena of various kinds 'in such a way that these phenomena can be seen as its expression or objectification at some grade or other, we must recognise those representations which [Schopenhauer] calls, after Plato, Ideas'.<sup>4</sup>

Schopenhauer claims to appropriate Plato's notion of the Idea, although he neither says explicitly what he takes Idea to mean for Plato himself (perhaps because this is not always clear) beyond a vague, presumptuous gesture, nor does he insist that the meaning he ascribes to Ideas is intended to be identical to Plato's.<sup>5</sup> We can be certain that Schopenhauer does not mean Ideas to represent the *perfection* of a given species, though the temporally-enduring species forms the empirical correlative of the Idea. Rather, Schopenhauer's Ideas resemble Plato's in serving as eternal archetypes to copies, perfect forms multiplied endlessly in imperfect natural objects.<sup>6</sup> Plato's Ideas ultimately culminate in an Idea of the Good, an original unity giving meaning to all other unities and constituting the ultimate reality. Schopenhauer's Ideas by contrast do not point to

a higher order Idea that encompasses all Ideas but, not being in themselves the ultimate reality, serve a quite different function metaphysically from those of Plato. In fact Schopenhauer's Ideas have a distinctly aesthetic function and they are made clear by art (more like the Ideas of Plotinus than Plato). Plato would recoil in horror at the picture of art as somehow elucidating, rather than obscuring, Ideas. But for Schopenhauer, art and the expression of the Idea are intimately linked.<sup>7</sup>

If Schopenhauer's Ideas are fixed, eternal patterns, then to perceive an Idea 'is a matter of perceiving an ordinary object with one's attention focused on the essential, and away from its inessential aspects.'<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the ordinary objects here referred to are *natural* objects in the phenomenal world. Ideas inhere in nature and out of them grow the more imaginative interpretations of art.<sup>9</sup> So, in aesthetic awareness, a pure subject of knowing focuses on the essential in a representation. The Idea that accompanies the process of objective knowing stands as an archetype of all objects for which it is an Idea - an archetype but not a *perfect* type (for to estimate that would require comparative reasoning). Still, we are left with problems. How does Schopenhauer account for the aesthetic apprehension of a *group* of objects, if each Idea represents a natural kind and the aesthetic consciousness reflects a bond between the pure subject and an Idea? Furthermore, how do we relate Ideas to our experience of one object as more beautiful than another, if Ideas stand beyond sensuous intuition and we are not to be concerned with relations? Schopenhauer attempts to construct a hierarchy of Ideas, one that reflects varying degrees of Will's objectification, but this too poses problems if we cannot allow relations or sensory response to enter into our appreciation of an object.

### (iii)

In the earlier volume of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer insists that the pure subject of knowing and the Ideas 'are entirely of equal weight; and as the object also is here nothing but the representation of the subject, so the subject...has also become that object itself, since the entire consciousness is nothing more than its most distinct image.' (WWR I, 34, 180) Subject and object (supposedly) fill each other reciprocally and are thus rendered indistinguishable. Yet, despite the reciprocity between the two constituents of aesthetic experience, the pleasure given or derived from one part may sometimes be greater than that from the other. At times aesthetic enjoyment will lie in the apprehension of the Idea and at times in the bliss and peace of pure knowing. The emphasis on one part or the other depends upon the "grade" of Will's objectification in the Idea: the higher the grade, the more object-oriented will be the aesthetic experience.

Each thing has its own characteristic beauty but Schopenhauer orders these beauties in a hierarchy. However, speaking of lower and higher beauties causes two problems. First, if some

forms of aesthetic experience stress the subject over the Idea, or vice-versa, we are left with a qualitative difference between *types* of aesthetic consciousness and hence the notion of escape from the tumult of Will becomes one of relative separation and relative salvation. Second, if some objects facilitate aesthetic contemplation more readily than others, does this mean that they express *Will* more completely in reference to their being?

The second problem arises in part from the first, Schopenhauer's insistence on the reciprocity of both constituent parts in aesthetic awareness: subject and object are allegedly melded into a unified aesthetic consciousness of Idea and pure subject. Once gradations are introduced, one must refer to relations between parts of objects or objects themselves, in order to discern how the emphasis on one part of the aesthetic consciousness comes about. If one object seems to represent the Idea more clearly than another - say, for example, that this pine tree before me is more effective in calling up the aesthetic response than the giant sequoia I saw yesterday - the pine is old and bare-branched, the sequoia, noble and vibrant) - exactly what Idea is being expressed in each case? Is it the simple Idea of "tree"? Anything more detailed than that would have to make recourse to conceptual distinctions, and yet we know that the Idea is given as a fixed entity in perception. I perceive the two different types of tree but my response to the pine is undeniably stronger than that effected by the giant sequoia (I go back to check just in case). To complicate the situation, I should note that the pine is the oldest living being on the planet, while the sequoia is the largest. The sequoia is huge and vital and teeming with life, while the pine looks twisted, squat and yellowy-dead. If the Idea of "tree" accords with the greened, growing towers we customarily perceive as trees, then the pine should be less effective in calling up the Idea of "tree" and hence less aesthetically compelling. Schopenhauer's metaphysical aesthetics leaves no room for a judgement in favour of the pine if Ideas are to call up the single, unified perception of natural type.

In her dissertation on the aesthetic appreciation of nature, Yuriko Saito claims that an object is more beautiful according to Schopenhauer 'if it expresses its Idea more clearly through distinct and unified parts.' To perceive an object of near perfection is not to perceive an absence of blemishes but rather to be aware of the way in which a good example of an object type gives rise to enjoyment of features which perceptually characterise the species.<sup>10</sup> We appreciate the way in which perceptual features of an object displays nicely the prominent characteristics of a type.<sup>11</sup> Julian Young also argues that aesthetic consciousness involves knowing not some esoteric object but the significant (rather than the trivial) aspects of an ordinary object brought into focus.<sup>12</sup> The crucial point arises in relation to the significant elements in an object: must they be species-related, referring somehow to the natural type at hand? Or can they be more complex perceptual features, such as the mere twistedness of the pine, its sense of ancient motion writhing from the land? If the aesthetic effectiveness depends on the proximity of perceptual features to the Idea as natural type,

then the giant sequoia ought to be more beautiful than the pine. But, if the pine inspires a stronger aesthetic response than the giant sequoia, perhaps we should rethink the relevance of Schopenhauer's Ideas to aesthetic judgements.

What makes one grade of Will's objectification higher than another? T.G. Taylor has shown that it cannot be an ontological superiority on the part of some objects, for if this were the case, Schopenhauer's hierarchy would be inverted. Schopenhauer puts human beings at the top of the gradations of Will but human beings manifest intelligence and, through aesthetic contemplation, even escape from Will itself. Will, on the other hand, is blind striving and moves strongly and obviously through the forces in the natural environment. If the gradation of Will through Ideas were meant to express ontological superiority, i.e., more literal approximation to Will, then surely Ideas in association with human beings would be far less beautiful than those forces like gravity or motion.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, gradations of Will must be epistemological in character: the higher grades are not more faithful expressions of Will as such but they are more easily recognised through Ideas as expressions of Will. Taylor thinks that the nature of our own experience of willing makes it easier to identify ourselves, and Ideas thereof, with Will. The inner nature of a rock is obscured for us, so we understand it by analogy with ourselves. The hierarchy of gradations thus stems from both the progressive self-realisation of Will through objects (cows have consciousness and hence a greater degree of Will's self-consciousness manifests itself there than in a rock) and the ease with which we recognise by analogy Will in things other than ourselves.

Taylor's is one of the most creative solutions to the puzzle of the Will's gradations, and it makes some sense theoretically, but there are still problems with the hierarchy itself. While I think Taylor is correct in claiming that the gradations cannot be based upon ontological considerations, he doesn't take the epistemological status of the hierarchy far enough. What happens if we concur without objection that this African violet pleases us more in perception than that cow beyond the fence? Schopenhauer's gradations, even in Taylor's rereading of them, deny such a possibility. Taylor manages to interpret the hierarchy of objectifications in a new and useful way but he fails to argue for the stability or relevance of the hierarchy itself. In addition to this, Taylor bases his assertions about the epistemological character of the hierarchy on the recognition of Will in Ideas, along the lines of an analogy with our own sense of willing. This does not hold because our own sense of willing arises insofar as we are individual persons, and conscious of it. Aesthetic consciousness for Schopenhauer admits of no personal individuality whatsoever. How can the grades of Will's objectification in Ideas be judged according to our awareness of them as like or unlike us *as individuals*? Perhaps Schopenhauer accounts for the hierarchy of Ideas through a progressive sense of Will's self-realisation, but this approach has at most a metaphysical significance, for it cannot explain *how* a higher grade of Will's objectification has a stronger



aesthetic effect, nor can it justify that this must indeed be the case. Ideas begin to look less like representations given to us from nature and more like vehicles for the production and reception of art.

(iv)

The confusion surrounding the functioning of Ideas in aesthetic experience and judgement points directly to a more potent and disruptive source of ambivalence in Schopenhauer's writings: the relationship between nature and art. Schopenhauer claims that Ideas mediate Will and objects, and that as representation Ideas come to us through nature but are expressed through art. As we have seen, it is not at all clear that Ideas have any power to direct our judgements about nature's beauty, or at least not an isolated power apart from sensuous texture or surface properties of objects. Ideas are more at home in art, where particular things are plucked from their environments and "held up" to view. The explicitness of Schopenhauer's ambivalence about nature and art, however, and the role of Ideas between the two, can be illustrated here in his amusingly disjointed opinions about the human countenance. Remember that human beings rest at the top of the hierarchy of Will's objectifications in Ideas.

No object transports us so readily into purely aesthetic contemplation as the most beautiful human countenance and form, at the sight of which we are instantly seized by an inexpressible satisfaction and lifted above ourselves and all that torments us. (WWR I, 45, 221)

Despite the enthusiasm in this passage, Schopenhauer immediately goes on to ask, in criticism of the human form, 'has nature ever produced a human being perfectly beautiful in all his parts?' (WWR I, 45, 221) The artist must conceive of perfect beauty before experiencing human beauty at all; we imagine that art copies nature to achieve beauty but we then find that the artist injects the Idea into his product.<sup>14</sup> However, Schopenhauer eventually returns to his original fondness for the natural beauty of the human being. '[W]e cannot help doubting whether anything of such essential unity and of such great originality could ever arise from any other source than the mysterious inner depths of the inner being of nature.' (WWR II, xxxvi, 421) He proceeds then to say that an artist's rendering can be only a 'half-true combination' of necessary parts and that 'we must doubt whether it is in fact a possible face, and whether nature, as the master of all masters, would not declare it to be a piece of bungling by demonstrating absolute contradictions in it.' (WWR II, xxxvi, 422-23)

Most scholars believe that Schopenhauer prefers artistic to natural beauty because the artist articulates what nature cannot. Once we accept this, it becomes easier to refer to Ideas through the

clarity of their expression in art. But, as the example of human beauty shows, Schopenhauer himself cannot make a commitment to the superiority of art. He expends an enormous amount of energy constructing a place for Ideas in art, only to undermine art's power to convey Ideas through form. However, it is possible to clarify what look like inconsistencies in Schopenhauer's text by distinguishing between his metaphysical text and an empirical subtext. Furthermore, this subtext has implications for the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment.

## 2. Schopenhauer's Subtext on Natural Beauty

### (i)

In his article 'Schopenhauer's Account of Aesthetic Experience' <sup>15</sup> T.J. Diffey acknowledges a problem that arises in the course of his attempt to demonstrate the influence of Schopenhauer on post-war Anglo-American aesthetics. Contemporary philosophers emphasise the non-practical, non-instrumental aspect of Schopenhauer's theory without adopting the metaphysical context in which his theory makes sense. Abandoning the doctrine of the Will leaves us with a difficulty, namely, how to explain the *significance* of aesthetic experience. Schopenhauer's aesthetic experience serves as the means to peace in a painful world but for us, 'aesthetic perception has to be taken as self-evidently good or intelligible. We are simply forced back on the claim that it just is good to appreciate the appearance of things for their own sake.'<sup>16</sup>

If Schopenhauer is read as advocating (Platonic) Ideas as vehicles for escaping Will then Diffey's reservations seem justified: 'at least Schopenhauer attempts some sort of explanation as to why the aesthetic should interest', <sup>17</sup> while contemporary theories, which 'are expected to operate within a totally secular view of the world', <sup>18</sup> most often do not. However, it is not clear that the significance of Schopenhauer's aesthetic experience does depend entirely on his metaphysical assumptions. Certain aspects of Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory form a subtext which stands in opposition to his more obvious theory about the relation between Ideas and the pure subject of knowing. Even if this subtext cannot resolve Diffey's problem about motivation behind aesthetic contemplation, it may offer a more palatable approach to Schopenhauer for contemporary philosophers, an approach which does not necessitate 'quietly dropping his views on the work of art as a sort of Platonic Idea'. <sup>19</sup>

Coincidentally, the basis for defending the value of the subtext in Schopenhauer is hinted at by Diffey in his article. Diffey thinks that, with regard to the aesthetic experiences of art and nature, Schopenhauer notices no problem between them as do Kant and Hegel. Kant focuses on the aesthetic attitude in relation to both art and nature, though making significant distinctions between

the two, while Hegel privileges art without exception. Schopenhauer seems to begin with an aesthetic attitude which ranges over both art and nature but then, claims Diffey, his account 'settles down to confining its attention to the work of art as expressive of Platonic forms or ideas.' <sup>20</sup>

On the surface of *The World as Will and Representation*, as well as on that of 'On the Metaphysics of the Beautiful and Aesthetics', Schopenhauer does appear to settle down into discussion of art and the Platonic idea, but on closer examination it is not unreasonable to see a contradictory approach to nature simultaneously at work. Diffey notes in passing that Schopenhauer doesn't encounter differences between art and nature, differences which need to be respected. <sup>21</sup> The key to unearthing the subtext in Schopenhauer's aesthetics is recognition of the fact that, contrary to 'passing on' from nature and 'settling into' discussions about art and Ideas, Schopenhauer continues throughout his theory to be at odds with himself over the character of natural beauty in aesthetic experience.

I wish to suggest, (A) that Schopenhauer sometimes *does* make a distinction between art and nature in aesthetic experience, and (B) that the specific worth of natural beauty constitutes a contradictory but compelling subtext to the doctrine of Ideas, a subtext that not only has relevance to contemporary aesthetics but also implies that Schopenhauer himself has two ways of looking at aesthetic contemplation: one, as a vehicle for escape from Will through Ideas; the other, as an activity occupied with the sensuous and harmonious surface features of the natural environment.

(ii)

If we accept that *all* aesthetic experience in Schopenhauer can be reduced to the relationship between the will-less subject and Ideas, then we rule out anything like an aesthetic experience as we ordinarily understand it. It is no wonder that Schopenhauer limits such epiphanies to the exclusive power of genius. When contrasting the limits of ordinary reason with the method of genius, Schopenhauer likens practical reason to an aimless mighty storm or the violently agitated drops of a waterfall, while the perception of genius shines like a silent sunbeam through that storm or a rainbow on a raging torrent. (WWR I, 36, 185)

Schopenhauer desires that we comprehend the serenity and fixed contemplative power of genius. Whether or not this power makes itself apparent is less compelling than the fact that Schopenhauer uses, to illustrate his comparison between ordinary people and genius, vividly textured scenes from the natural environment. Similarly, the contrast between the method of aesthetic appreciation through Ideas and the contemplation of nature's beauty through its sensuous surface, makes explicit the tension between metaphysics and empirical observation that pervades

Schopenhauer does often emphasise the metaphysical function of art and aesthetic experience to the detriment of more concrete perceptual encounters but it must not be supposed that he denies formal or material beauty altogether.

There yet belongs to it [art] in addition a separate beauty independent of this. That beauty is produced by the mere harmony of colours, the agreeable aspect of the grouping, the favourable distribution of light and shade, and the tone of the whole picture. This accompanying and subordinate kind of beauty promotes the condition of pure knowing....[it is] not what is essential, but acts first and immediately. (WWR II, xxxvi, 422)

Schopenhauer needs to underscore the inferior character of sensuous beauty because the apprehension of such beauty involves relations, sufficient reason and individuality, but the fact that he allows the independent existence of sensuous beauty -and that this beauty acts 'first and immediately' in aesthetic awareness - introduces a bifurcation into what he means by 'aesthetic'. Beauty attains its full metaphysical value as a means of escape from willing and Will, but it also exerts influence without a metaphysical framework. If we take Schopenhauer's metaphysics seriously, we might find an object or scene beautiful in appearance but the experience of that beauty serves only to impel us into a state devoid of the initial sensuousness: material beauty promotes non-material beauty. Schopenhauer is never really clear on how this promotion takes place.

In addition, he often appears to be in conflict over whether or not to admit the importance of the sensuous surface to aesthetic experiences. His ambivalence is most obvious in contradictory passages about art and nature. First I shall examine those passages in which Schopenhauer emphasises the metaphysical superiority of art, in order to throw his comments about the sensuous beauty of the natural environment into theoretical relief.

In Volume II of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer states that 'life is *never* beautiful, but only in the pictures of it, namely in the transfiguring mirror of art or poetry'. (WWR II, xxx, 374) This is complemented by a note from the essay 'On the Metaphysics of the Beautiful and Aesthetics' : 'complete satisfaction, the final quieting, the true desirable state, always present themselves in the picture, the *work of art* , the poetry or the music.' (OMB, 205, 416) Given the assumption that art lifts us out of the tumult of Will and into a sort of still timelessness, these views reflect the Schopenhauerian orthodoxy. The art work embodies the closest thing to permanence by communicating the Idea. Since Ideas are the source of aesthetic significance in



Schopenhauer's metaphysics, attempts to capture and convey them will be more valuable than fleeting glimpses of them in the world. 'The work of plastic art does not, like reality, show us that which exists only once and never again...it shows us the *form alone*, which would be the Idea itself'. (OMB, 209, 422)

The genius, furthermore, communicates his particular vision of the Idea through art, for he alone has the power to sustain his perceptions of the Ideas found in nature.

...by recognising in the individual thing its *Idea*, he, so to speak, *understands nature's half-spoken words*. He expresses clearly what she merely stammers. He impresses on the hard marble the beauty of the form which nature failed to achieve in a thousand attempts. (WWR I, 46, 222)

Beauty can be perceived in the world by the gifted few but art delivers their perceptions 'with greater concentration, perfection intention and intelligence' than does nature. (WWR I, 52, 266) Gleaning aesthetic satisfaction from art is (oddly!), for Schopenhauer, like the eating of meat: aesthetic 'digestion' is facilitated by the fact that the work of art is an Idea that has already passed through a subject, just as animal nourishment is, for the body, vegetable matter already assimilated. (OMB, 209, 421) For those of us unendowed with genius, art works and artists convey glimpses of the beauty and will-less peace which might otherwise escape our notice in a world dominated by practical interest.

In spite of these claims, Schopenhauer at other points in his texts not only praises nature for its powerful beauty but condemns human interference in it as well.<sup>22</sup> Nature's particular beauty, in the ensuing passage, is found in sensuous forms and the relations among them, rather than in metaphysical forms. Furthermore, this beauty manifests itself in a place or a location rather than in a single object or Idea of that object.

Yet how aesthetic nature is! Every little spot entirely uncultivated and wild, in other words, left free to nature herself, however small it may be, if only man's paws leave it alone, is at once decorated by her in the most tasteful manner, is draped with plants, flowers and shrubs, whose easy, unforced manner, natural grace and delightful grouping testify that they have not grown up under the rod of correction of the great egoist, but that nature has here been freely active. Every neglected little place at once becomes beautiful. (WWR II, xxxiv, 404)<sup>23</sup>

Here Schopenhauer dismisses several notions about nature's aesthetic inferiority to art. He indicates that nature *is* beautiful; this assertion conflicts with the one expressed previously, where nature as a part of life is said never to be beautiful except 'in the transfiguring mirror of art or poetry'. Notice

that Schopenhauer actually belittles human interference in nature by representing it through the metonym 'paws'. Nature needs no assistance, on this account, to make manifest its beauty.

In addition, the beauties displayed by uncultivated nature have not grown up under the 'rod' of the 'great egoist'. Here surely comes an indictment to human capacities. By referring to man as the 'great egoist' Schopenhauer reveals humanity as being overly-concerned with its own affairs in the world, with making its mark everywhere seen. And, the image of man's using a 'rod' in the 'correction' of nature does not concur with the earlier passage about the need for nature to be perfected, improved upon or clarified by man.<sup>24</sup> This can be abstracted in a way that is relevant to art: if art is interpreted as an improvement upon nature in presenting beauty through Ideas, a perfection of her stammerings in material articulation, then how are we to reconcile this with the sentiments expressed in the above passage?

A further reflection exacerbates Schopenhauer's equivocation.

We contemplate perfection in the works of nature, which can never be sufficiently admired, and which, even in the lowest and smallest organisms...is carried out with such infinite care and unwearied labour, as though the work of nature before us had been the only one, on which she was therefore able to lavish all her skill and power...We therefore observe that nature by no means wearies or begins to bungle, but that with equally patient master-hand she perfects the last as the first. (WWR II, xxv, 321-22)

This passage presents a contradiction to the earlier passage about art, where nature (at work in the human form) 'stammers' and fails 'to achieve in a thousand attempts' what art expresses in one. If nature, as here depicted, perfects the last to the first of her forms, then there can be no *aesthetic* need for human beings to rearticulate its beauty. Art must perfect something other than the sensuous form of nature itself, since nature does not bungle in its objects. The equivocation about the strength of nature's beauty results from Schopenhauer's attempt to squeeze all aesthetic experience into a coherent metaphysical framework, one which insists upon the supremacy of art to nature based on art's alleged distillation of the Idea from nature.

The observations above indicate that beauty permeates all organisms in nature, the lowest as well as the highest. The grades of objectification, so necessary to the metaphysical treatment of representational art,<sup>25</sup> have no *aesthetic* significance in nature. Even the most ordinary specimens of vegetable nature arrange themselves in 'picturesque groups' when human caprice is removed or when areas of nature have escaped cultivation. (OMB, 213, 426). A conventional reading of Schopenhauer places art in the position of 'clarifying' or 'perfecting' an inferior nature but it is

clear that even Schopenhauer cannot bring himself to hold this view consistently. Tangentially, he certainly does not look kindly upon needless human intervention in the natural environment - a viewpoint well ahead of its time.

(iii)

A few contradictions and inconsistencies within Schopenhauer's thoughts on aesthetics are now clear. Sometimes he does, as Diffey claims, meld one type of beauty into another for the sake of metaphysical ease, but the particular manner in which Schopenhauer discusses the strength of uncultivated natural beauty ought to prevent us from assuming that he makes no distinction between art and nature, or that he favours art *aesthetically*. The distinction appears when we observe the character of Schopenhauer's conflict over whether nature or art facilitates the apprehension of Ideas more readily.

For Schopenhauer aesthetic experience consists not only in stillness from the tumult of Will, precipitated by the apprehension of Ideas, but also in the transition from the interested application of practical reason to non-practical (dis-interested) perception: 'one thing is more beautiful than another because it facilitates this purely objective contemplation, goes out to meet it, and, so to speak, even compels it and then we call the thing very beautiful.' (WWR I, 41, 210) In light of this compare the following passages.

That the Idea comes to us more easily from the work of art than directly from nature and from reality, arises solely from the fact that the artist, who knew only the Idea and not reality, clearly repeated in his work only the Idea. (WWR I, 37, 195)

...transition into the state of pure perception occurs most easily when the objects accommodate themselves to it, in other words, when by their manifold and at the same time definite and distinct form they easily become representations of their Ideas, in which beauty, in the objective sense, consists. Above all, natural beauty has this quality, and even the most stolid and apathetic person obtains therefrom at least a fleeting, aesthetic pleasure. (WWR I, 39, 200-01)

Two important facets of Schopenhauer's observations about natural beauty emerge from these quotations and neither fits neatly into his metaphysical scheme. In spite of the claim that natural beauty facilitates the apprehension of Ideas, Schopenhauer says that nature's beauty grows out of the 'manifold and at the same time distinct form' of the objects within nature: individual objects

are first seen within a context, an *environment*. Nature appears in 'delightful groupings' (WWR II, xxxiii, 404), plants, animals, sounds and sensations together. When speaking of art's beauty (or of the beauty of a single natural object, e.g., a tree) Schopenhauer stresses the unified singularity of the beautiful object and its Idea in isolation from any context. Art 'plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world's course, and holds it isolated before it.' (WWR I, 36, 185) When referring to nature, however, Schopenhauer often depicts beauty in an environmental fashion.<sup>26</sup> Not, I hasten to add, a superficial kind of fashion, used by the advertising industry to appeal to ecologically-minded consumers today, but a genuinely interactive, environmental way of seeing relations between objects in nature.

The beauty of a landscape, claims Schopenhauer, depends upon a 'multiplicity of natural objects found together in it, and on the fact that they are clearly separated, appear distinctly and yet exhibit themselves in fitting association and succession.' (WWR I, 44 218) Furthermore, 'the sight of vegetation delights us directly and in a high degree, but naturally the more so, the richer, more varied, more extended it is, and also the more it is left to itself.' (OMB, 213, 425) Non-interference is again cited as a good with regard to nature but, more importantly, Schopenhauer introduces into the character of natural beauty the concepts of variation, association and extension. These do not conform to the isolation of the Idea in apprehension. Rather, they undermine the notion that art implies through careful presentation of the individual 'the revelation of the (Platonic) *Idea* of that individual's species.' (OMB 208, 420) One assumes that many species occupy a beautiful natural environment and that, in displaying themselves in association with and succession to each other, they are disqualified - by virtue of promoting beauty through *relation* - from attaining metaphysical significance, which issues from a promotion of 'objective' perception in Ideas.

The other peculiar facet of Schopenhauer's ideas on natural beauty is his inclusion of people other than geniuses among appreciators. He admits again and again that nature's beauty in particular compels our attention and has an effect on even the most apathetic of observers (the results are sometimes, not always, said to be fleeting - but even the genius is said to attain only a fleeting knowledge of the Idea in nature; see OMB 206, 419). When discussing the perception of Ideas Schopenhauer insists on the ability of genius to *sustain* a meaningful vision in nature but, when turning his attention to the sensuous beauty of nature, Schopenhauer extends the possibility of aesthetic experience to all people. At one point in *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer suggests that we should study plants and animals 'in their free natural and easy state' in order to obtain an instructive lesson from the 'great book of nature.' (WWR I, 44, 219) In this as in many other passages of the text (especially those on the sublime, which I shall explore in the next chapter) Schopenhauer extends an invitation to *all* persons rather than to genius alone.



If "ought" implies "can", then Schopenhauer's entreaties on behalf of nature's beauty and instructiveness defy his other assertions about the relationship between the ordinary observer and the aesthetic.

Certainly it is genius that can both perceive and communicate a vision or Idea: creative expression through art cannot be the province of every human being. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer cannot make up his mind about the most effective aesthetic vehicle for ordinary people. Sometimes he advocates art as the best means to apprehension of the Idea while at other times he awards this function to nature. Correspondingly, which one he advocates often depends upon whether or not he is at that moment expounding his metaphysical views or what I take to be his more empirical observations, where nature is contemplated environmentally rather than as a depository for individual objects and their Ideas.

The problem can be resolved if we read Schopenhauer as making a practical distinction between art and nature in aesthetic experience. Art perhaps elucidates single objects or events, lifting them from their environments and focusing on some of their specific and constitutive elements. Nature, by contrast, has a more powerful effect when taken as a whole, presenting individual forms but always within an interactive environment. Art facilitates communication based on single Ideas while nature taken as an aggregate precipitates the aesthetic response most readily, especially in the ordinary observer: aesthetic perception 'is facilitated and favoured from without by accommodating objects, by the abundance of natural beauty that invites contemplation and even presses itself on us.' (WWR I, 38, 197) Finally, art serves not only as the object of aesthetic contemplation but as a non-discursive form of communication by means of which the genius expresses his vision of the Idea. The 'reflectiveness' of the genius 'gives him as a poet the ability to describe nature so clearly, palpably, and vividly, or as a painter, to portray it.' (OMB 206, 419)<sup>27</sup> Nature, unable to serve as a means of communication, nevertheless functions as an aesthetic object most effectively through its sensuous variety.

Schopenhauer fits art easily into his metaphysical scheme but his feelings for the natural environment often prevent him from subordinating its unique beauty -the relational, 'secondary', sensuous beauty acknowledged earlier - to any overarching system. Although he does at times try to depict nature as giving rise to Ideas through single objects, the environmental character of natural beauty exerts the stronger hold on his imagination and thus presents us with a model of appreciation in conflict with the one issuing from beauty beheld in isolation.

Schopenhauer also advocates nature as a soothing presence in a life dominated by will; again, no special effort is made to distinguish his remarks for the ears of genius. The 'man tormented by passions, want or care, is so suddenly revived, cheered and comforted by a single, free glance into nature' and is moved 'in a marvellous way' by its forms. (WWR I, 38, 197) While Schopenhauer often maintains that aesthetic experiences do not occur for those preoccupied by will or the dictates of practical reason, he here suggests that nature, in addition to eliciting the aesthetic response from ordinary observers, smooths away the conditions of mind that might prevent that response in the first place.

From this excellent quality of the sight of the beauties of nature is to be explained first the harmonious and thoroughly satisfying character of its impression, and then the favourable effect it has on the whole of our thinking...the thinking now attempts to follow in the consistency, connexion, regularity and harmony of all its processes that method of nature, after it has been brought thereby into the right inspiration. A beautiful view is therefore a cathartic of the mind...and in its presence a person will think most correctly. (WWR II, xxxiii, 403-404)

This passage may be, for several reasons, one of the most puzzling in relation to Schopenhauer's metaphysical aesthetics.

Clearly Schopenhauer focuses on the *beauty* of nature (as displayed through its *beauties*: again, the emphasis is environmental and interactive as opposed to singularity in Ideas) as something that can facilitate peace of mind. On the one hand we might read this as reinforcement for the notion that, in Diffey's words, 'peace of mind is intrinsically the best state of mind to be in or have, and that to have perceptual knowledge of the forms of nature is instrumental to securing this peace of mind by setting aside the urgencies of will and desire.'<sup>28</sup> However, Schopenhauer himself prevents our reading this passage in that manner by stating that the excellent beauties of nature *first* give rise to explanations about 'the harmonious and thoroughly satisfying character of its impression'. The 'favourable effect on the mind' *then* follows as a most welcome corollary but the aesthetic worth of the natural environment is first appreciated for its own sake.

I argue this not only because Schopenhauer clearly gives the aesthetic aspect of nature precedence here but because it seems inconsistent to interpret this as an example of Schopenhauer's metaphysical aesthetics by invoking aesthetic experience as an *instrument* in the attainment of peace of mind. In all matters of the aesthetic, whether the objects be of nature or of art, Schopenhauer denies the instrumentality of the aesthetic object or experience. If one sets out to have an aesthetic experience in order to clear one's head, the sheer practicality of the venture would surely prevent aesthetic awareness. Thus does Schopenhauer take care to stress the primacy

of the aesthetic experience of nature itself, placing the correlative catharsis in the role of a pleasant after-effect.

Still, the character of the after-effect strikes me as odd in view of Schopenhauer's metaphysics. If we read this passage correctly a beautiful view of nature leads to clear thinking: the aesthetic influences practical reasoning. Schopenhauer does not say that the person in the presence of nature will *perceive* more clearly, nor does he claim that aesthetic experience promotes metaphysical separation from will. He states, quite simply, that the beauty of nature promotes a pattern of consistency, connexion, regularity and harmony in the mind that perceives it. Rather than contrive a barrier between aesthetic experiences and non-aesthetic mental events, Schopenhauer here acknowledges the positive and holistic interaction of body, mind and spirit. He seems, in his admiration for the beauties of nature, to have forgotten their lowly place in the hierarchy of objectifications and to have overlooked the fact that they are by-products of Will in its most blind form.

Add to this the overt nod to harmony in nature - an admission that nature's beauty does not depend on a single Idea but on the relations between individual forms - and Schopenhauer's aesthetics emerges as being far from an integrated whole. Recalling the earlier passage about landscape (WWR I, 44 218) : is "landscape" and Idea? Surely not, since by Schopenhauer's own definition landscape consists of a multitude of clearly defined forms, while Ideas are the form of individual species. (OMB 208, 420) Yet, he assents to landscapes possessing beauty. Georg Simmel, in *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, criticises Schopenhauer for tearing objects out of their environment in order to serve Ideas: 'the release of the object from its relativity simultaneously cancels its individuality, because the latter can only be posited on the basis of elements external to itself.'<sup>29</sup> If landscapes possess beauty for Schopenhauer the beauty they possess is not the beauty of art and Ideas. Simmel's criticisms apply to the metaphysical structure of Schopenhauer's theory but not to the subtext, which not only contradicts the theory in several places but presents a different idea of what is aesthetically significant as well. If the relation between objects in aesthetic experience becomes an important factor in appreciation - if multiplicity and variation emerge as constitutive elements in our awareness of a beautiful landscape - then perhaps the will-less subject of knowing can be replaced by a human individual.

In order to attend to the forms and processes of nature we need to engage in sensuous apprehension of the environment around us. Sensuous aesthetic apprehension involves an awareness of ourselves as individuals but without the appetitive urges normally associated with self-consciousness. The apprehension of nature's beauty in Schopenhauer's text includes cognizance of relations in the environment as well as attunement to our own capacity for sensuous perception,

but the individual involved in aesthetic appreciation is an individual *transformed* by the abandonment of those concerns that usually constitute practical life. Just as we discover Will phenomenally through our individual wills, so is the beauty and power of nature encountered through the transformed individual mind: 'only insofar as every knowing being is at the same time an individual and thus a part of nature, does the approach to the interior of nature stand open to him, namely in his own self-consciousness.' (WWR II, xxix, 364) The significance of nature as representation offers itself to the individual as well, albeit a transformed individual who attends to the sensuous environment aesthetically rather than appetitively.

(v)

I have attempted to call attention to the ambivalence about nature in Schopenhauer's aesthetics and I have suggested that this ambivalence allows us to discern the limitations of the Idea model when applied to the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment. I have also tried to suggest by way of examples from his writings on aesthetics that Schopenhauer makes a subtle distinction between natural and artistic beauty and that this distinction, taken as a tension between text and subtext, creates a space from which to discern Schopenhauer's relevance to contemporary aesthetics. The most obvious point of disparity falls between his claim that life is never beautiful except in pictures and the contradictory assertion that nature is always beautiful if only human beings would leave it alone. Certainly his invectives against interference in the natural environment accord with what is currently a popular doctrine. We are left, however, with the rather weighty presence of the metaphysics supporting the primary text.

Diffey worries about approaching Schopenhauer's aesthetics in a piecemeal fashion, taking what is relevant to contemporary dialogue while politely ignoring the supposed justification for the entire enterprise. A conventional reading of Schopenhauer assumes that his aesthetics stands unified behind the metaphysics. If, by contrast, we accept the contradictions inherent in the text as indicative of Schopenhauer's own equivocation on matters aesthetic, then there is reason for supposing that aesthetic contemplation has value *notwithstanding* the particular metaphysical framework with which Schopenhauer surrounds it. Try as he might, Schopenhauer has trouble disposing of sensuous, if metaphysically secondary, beauty. This entire subtext of secondary beauty (so well illustrated in nature), submerged beneath the text when read metaphysically, emerges as surprisingly modern when the passages about the natural environment are read closely. The direct contradictions in the theory justify the assertion that Schopenhauer displays two tendencies on the issue of beauty (sensuous vs. metaphysical) and that, while the power to create works of art remains the province of genius, the ordinary individual enjoys nature's particularly environmental beauty without the interference of either practical concerns or the guidance of Ideas.



This solves one aspect of Diffey's problem while failing to address the other: since Schopenhauer lacks consistency in his commitment to a metaphysical aesthetics we can assume that he, like ourselves, might well fall prey to the idea that the aesthetic is either self-justifying or that it engages motives other than that of transcendence. However, the recognition of a distinction in Schopenhauer's aesthetics between art and the natural environment leaves us with a further problem, namely, whether or not his inconsistent but compelling subtext can be interpreted as representative of some more widespread equivocation over art and nature in the discipline of aesthetics generally.

## NOTES - CHAPTER TWO

- <sup>1</sup> Schopenhauer has, however, popped up in one or two discussions related to environmental ethics. See G.E. Varner, 'The Schopenhauerian Challenge to Environmental Ethics' *Environmental Ethics* 7(3): 209-229, Fall 1985 ; and Paul Neureiter, 'Schopenhauer's Will as Aesthetic Criterion' *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 20: 41-50, 1986.
- <sup>2</sup> Julian Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 82.
- <sup>3</sup> Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), p. 204.
- <sup>4</sup> D.W. Hamlyn, *The Arguments of the Philosophers: Schopenhauer* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 107.
- <sup>5</sup> James Chansky, *Schopenhauer's Aesthetic Metaphysics*, a dissertation submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the Philosophy Department at Boston College, 1985, p. 127 (unpublished).
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 136; and also Frederick Coppleston, S.J. *Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism* (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd., 1946), p. 105.
- <sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Mr. Peter Lewis, who shared with me his insights regarding the relationship between Plato's Ideas and those of Schopenhauer, during two very helpful conversations at Edinburgh.
- <sup>8</sup> Young, p. 93.
- <sup>9</sup> Schopenhauer has a small problem with regard to Ideas and nature: if Ideas are singular unities inspired by individual objects, is it then impossible for one to have an Idea of, say, landscape? And, how could one *depict* such variety in a single Idea, if it were possible? I shall take this up in a future section.
- <sup>10</sup> Yuriko Saito, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Western and Japanese Perspectives and Their Ethical Implications*, a dissertation submitted for the degree of Ph.D. at the Department of Philosophy, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1983, p. 78 (unpublished).
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.79.
- <sup>12</sup> Young, p. 93.
- <sup>13</sup> T.G. Taylor, 'Platonic ideas, Aesthetic Experience and the Resolution of Schopenhauer's Great Contradiction' *International Studies in Philosophy* 19(3): 43-53, p. 46.
- <sup>14</sup> The lapse here into gender specific language is intentional, for Schopenhauer's women may possess talent, but not one of them is capable of genius, that requisite state of mind and ability to produce works of art.
- <sup>15</sup> T.J. Diffey, 'Schopenhauer's Account of Aesthetic Experience', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 30(2): 132-142, April 1990.

- 16 Ibid., p. 141.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid., p. 139.
- 19 Ibid., 136.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 While I do not interpret art as 'interference' *in* nature, it can certainly be categorised as an improvement *on* nature in terms of its aesthetic significance within Schopenhauer's metaphysical system.
- 23 Compare Schopenhauer's passage to this passage of Kant's, where he criticises Marsden for preferring a pepper garden, laid out in neat rows, to the free beauties of nature.

...but he need only have made the experiment of passing one day in his pepper garden to realise that once the regularity has enabled the understanding to put itself in accord with the order that is its constant requirement, instead of the object diverting him any longer, it imposes an irksome constraint upon the imagination; whereas nature subject to no constraint of artificial rules, and lavish, as it there is, in its luxuriant variety can supply constant food for taste. (CJ 22, 89)
- 24 Its tone also stands in contrast to that of a passage in WWR I, 34, 181, where human beings are the supporters of the world and nature an accident of their being.
- 25 '[F]or in every case the object of aesthetic contemplation is not the individual thing, but the Idea in it striving for revelation, in other words, the adequate objectivity of the Will at a definite grade.' (WWR I, 41, 209)
- 26 In his book *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (University of Massachusetts Press 1986) Georg Simmel accuses Schopenhauer of subordinating variety to a single intellectual interpretation and gives as an example Schopenhauer's dry account of clouds (WWR I, 35, 182), which I cited earlier. In that passage Schopenhauer does sacrifice environmental variety but this is countered by the passion he reserves for speaking about nature's manifold beauty in other places.
- 27 See also WWR II, xxx, 371; and WWR II xxxiv, 408.
- 28 Diffey, pp. 138-39.
- 29 Simmel, p. 78.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS

#### I. THE SUBLIME

##### 1. Approaching Natural Beauty Through the Sublime

One of the most fruitful means for understanding nature's particular aesthetic impact on human beings is the sublime as discussed by Kant and Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer claims, 'by far the most excellent thing in *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* is the theory of the sublime' (WWR I, Appendix, 532) and, while his own account owes much to Kant, Kant's owes much to that of Edmund Burke. Kant's debt to Burke and, to a lesser extent, Addison, is made clear by Paul Crowther in his book *The Kantian Sublime*. Crowther's thorough discussion of the phenomenological character of the sublime response over six chapters leads to a seventh, more "applied" chapter, where he proceeds to 'consider in what sense, direct or modified, it applies in the particular case of art.' <sup>1</sup> Crowther pursues this path in spite of his recognition that, for Kant, 'the experience of sublimity focuses on nature, and the arguments of the third *Critique* provide a massive and influential legitimization of this emphasis'. <sup>2</sup> He defends his approach by linking the preference for nature as an object of aesthetic sensibility with Romanticism, which strikes many as being 'outmoded'. Like most philosophers working in aesthetics, Crowther validates his views by showing that his theory 'can also encompass the domain of human artifice and contrivance' <sup>3</sup> - an enterprise not unworthy in itself but one which, in following a well-trodden path through aesthetics, avoids the exploration of increasingly remote, but no less relevant, topics like nature.

The potential of the sublime to be a dimension of the aesthetics of nature has been cited by Arnold Berleant in his essay 'The Aesthetics of Art and Nature'. Berleant maintains that the "disinterested" contemplation appropriate to many works of art does not suit the aesthetic appreciation of nature. He argues instead for a theory 'that acknowledges the experience of continuity, assimilation and engagement that nature encourages'. <sup>4</sup> While the accounts of Kant and Schopenhauer on the sublime do not promote assimilation *per se*, they *do* provide the foundation for a unique approach to appreciation, one that takes notice of human size and capacities in relation to the natural environment. I shall highlight certain aspects of their theories here, making explicit the weaknesses and strengths that will be modified in my "Self-to-Setting" model of nature appreciation (Chapter 8).



## 2. Kant: The Outrage of the Sublime

### (i)

The first thing to acknowledge about Kant's sublime is that it misses the point. For the purpose of theoretical continuity Kant must locate the sublime not in objects or our relation to them but in the 'supersensible cast of mind' <sup>5</sup> inspired by the ideas of reason in triumph over the formlessness presented to imagination. This formlessness is in *itself* a problem, which I shall discuss momentarily. But here at the outset I concur with Mary Mothersill.

...both of Kant's additions to the literature of the sublime strike me as wrong-headed, and equally unfair, as it were, to hurricanes and to the moral conscience...If I discover some affinity between great natural spectacles and my own mundane efforts to do what I know I ought to do, it is the former that illuminates and elevates the latter - not *vice-versa*. <sup>6</sup>

By focusing on the mind of moral humanity rather than the overwhelming relationship between an individual human being and their environment, Kant neglects an opportunity to make manifest the aesthetic properties of the natural world. Crowther reflects on one source of the neglect in *The Kantian Sublime*.

[K]ant's account of the mathematical sublime involves the interweaving of two rather different lines of argument. On the one hand there is the major - rather baroque- thesis about vast objects leading us to search out infinity in order to provide a measure for the estimation of their magnitude; and on the other hand there is the minor, more austere account which arrives at the sublime through imagination's inadequacy to satisfy reason's idea of the object as a whole (i.e., present an intuition corresponding to the idea of its phenomenal totality). The extraordinary complexity of Kant's theory is in part due to the fact that he does not clearly articulate that he *is* using two different approaches. That Kant does not do this is particularly unfortunate in that his major baroque thesis seems both phenomenologically counter-intuitive and philosophically superfluous. <sup>7</sup>

It is this second, more austere aspect of Kant's account which interests me in relation to the aesthetics of the natural environment. Crowther, quite rightly, argues that an object can suggest infinity by 'swamping' our imagination, and that in doing so it throws judgement into a process which is 'structurally similar to the difficulty we would have in likewise comprehending the idea of infinity as a whole.' <sup>8</sup> Furthermore, he implies that Kant would have been wiser to organise his exposition of the sublime around the austere approach, since this would have avoided some difficulties associated with reducing aesthetic experience to moral status. I agree with Crowther

here: the austere approach harnesses infinity by analogy and puts the primary emphasis on the relation between a vast object or event and the judging subject, i.e., on an *environmental* relationship experienced aesthetically. In what follows, I shall be focusing on Kant's more austere approach to the sublime in order to clarify the environmental character of nature's beauty and the implications of this for the development of an account of nature's specifically aesthetic dimension.

(ii)

Differences between the sublime and the beautiful in nature are clearly defined by Kant, as are the similarities. Both modes of aesthetic experience please on their own account; presuppose a judgement of reflection rather than one of logic or sense alone; delight in the mere presentation of an intuition and express accord between imagination and the faculty of concepts; exist as singular judgements and as universally valid for all feeling subjects. As for differences, Kant sees them as marked and crucial to a proper understanding of the unique power of the sublime. The beautiful in nature consists in the limitation of the *form* of an object; the sublime is found more readily in relation to *formless* objects, provoking ideas of limitlessness (though with a superadded thought of totality). The beautiful is a presentation of an indeterminate concept of understanding; the sublime is the presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason; the former delights in quality, the latter, quantity. The beautiful favours a direct feeling of the furtherance of life and is conducive to charms of sense; the sublime provides only indirect pleasure, relying on a momentary checking of vital forces to allow a more powerful emotion, which admits of no charm and is earnest in character. Beauty coincides with positive pleasure, the sublime with a check of powers.

The most important distinction between the two, though, involves the adaptability of objects in nature to our powers of judgement. While beauty manifests itself in forms which intimate a pleasurable finality in reference to our powers of judgement, the sublime 'may appear, indeed, in point of form to contravene the ends of our power of judgement, to be ill-adapted to our faculty of presentation, and to be, as it were, an outrage on the imagination, and yet it is judged all the more sublime on that account.' (CJ 23, 91) And, '[t]he beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, apart from any interest; the sublime, to esteem something highly even in opposition to our (sensible) interest.' (CJ 29, 119)

This esteem grows out of an attempt by the mind to '*think* nature itself in its totality as a presentation of something supersensible, without our being able to effectuate this presentation objectively.' (CJ 29, 119) As encountered in the face of nature, the sublime is the object '*the representation of which determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation of idea*'. (CJ 29, 119) Events or objects in nature appear out of our reach, either

quantitatively through their expanse or qualitatively through their threat to our survival. Kant says that the presentation of these events or objects leads to cognizance of our superiority over them by virtue of reason and that this superiority depends on a movement within the faculties. While we speak of the sublime as referring to objects, it actually refers to the state of mind in which those objects are viewed; it alludes to our superior status through the ideas of reason. Beauty involves a restful contemplation of the object in Kant's system but sublimity involves a movement of mental faculties combined with the estimation of the object, a movement toward either the faculty of cognition in the case of the mathematically sublime, or the faculty of desire in the case of the dynamically sublime. The mind overcomes the hindrances of sensibility by means of moral principles.

(iii)

In discussion of the mathematically sublime Kant concerns himself with that which is absolutely great beyond all comparison. Such greatness is ascribed indeterminately in terms of number, for it is an aesthetic, rather than a logical, estimation of greatness. Imagination strives to represent infinity (due to the inspiring and overwhelming greatness of the object in view) but fails in light of reason's demand for expressing totality as a real idea; the failure of sense-representation to reflect the ideas of reason awakens in us the feeling of the supersensible at work. The mind transcends sense.

So, if we call the sight of the starry heavens *sublime*, we must not found our estimate of it upon any concepts of worlds inhabited by rational beings...But we must take it, just as it strikes the eye, as a broad and all-embracing canopy. (CJ 29, 121- 122)

Kant wishes us to see mathematical sublimity as 'the poets do, according to what the impression upon the eye reveals'. The idea of number functions metaphorically, expressing the general concept of "very many" which in turn gives a visual suggestion of infinity. The ability of reason to conceive totality in spite of imagination's inability to represent it adequately is the basis for the moral connotations of the sublime.

Despite its initial plausibility there is some confusion in Kant's mathematical sublime. One cannot be sure exactly what he refers to when he states the imagination fails to live up to the ideas of reason. For example, if I am confronted by an abyss so deep and expansive (a literal abyss - not Kant's abyss of the infinite regress!), extending about me from left to right as far as my eyes can see, and below me to depths unfathomable to sight, I would be encountering an instance of Kant's mathematical sublime. The abyss strikes me as huge and great, not in comparison to other sorts of

abyss that I have encountered in my time, but simply great in itself or perhaps in comparison to me, the human scale. In Kant's universe the impression given to me by the abyss cannot be taken in in one glance or view; my imagination 'spends its whole faculty of comprehension on it in vain' (Crowther's austere approach). Kant also says that the fundamental measure of nature is its absolute whole, 'which regarded as phenomenon, is infinity comprehended' (CJ, 26, 104) (Crowther's baroque approach). So, when looking at the abyss in a baroque manner, I am reminded that the proper measure of nature is its absolute whole, that the universe's proper measure is totality, which I cannot possibly represent in a single intuition. In trying to do so, I am led into infinite regress.

The quantification of nature can extend infinitely. Kant gives an example in Section 26 of a tree measured by human height; a mountain measured by tree height; the earth's diameter expressed in terms of mountains; the earth's diameter as the standard for measuring planetary systems, and so on to infinity. In aesthetic terms this translates into proportionally greater units in the division of nature and it represents 'all that is great in nature as in turn becoming little; or to be more exact, it represents our imagination in all its boundlessness, and with it nature, as sinking into insignificance before ideas of reason, once their adequate presentation is attempted.' (CJ,26,105) Reason has the idea of totality that imagination cannot represent - in attempting to represent through the medium of nature it falls into infinite regress - and the realization that we can conceive of that which cannot be presented to sense, Kant attributes to a sublime state of mind.

But how does the infinite regress of nature in imagination relate to my *impression* of the abyss before me? To answer this question, we must shift to Crowther's austere approach to Kant's sublime. The sublime relation between infinity and my perception of the abyss does not grow out of imagination's endless strife to complete the compilation of the universe by parts. Rather, it arises out of the *impression* of the abyss as infinite, an impression given to sight as a limited capacity. In other words, there is a *felt* sense of the abyss as an infinite entity which surrounds or overwhelms me in the apprehension of it. In this way Kant's austere approach to the sublime is an environmental one: the abyss becomes the context for feeling and apprehension, for estimating one's place in a much larger 'whole'. The austere approach offers a more palatable avenue into Kant's sublime than the baroque approach, for the baroque relies yet again on the idea of the supersensible to support it.

If the proper measure of nature is its absolute whole, then this requires a substrate upon which all things in nature are grounded and unified. While there are no vistas into the supersensible, reason presupposes membership in it by recognising (in a non-mystical fashion) its own concept of totality, inadequately represented by phenomena in the world. For Kant's baroque sublime to be



tenable, one must accept the supersensible substrate as a justification for suggesting absolute totality as nature's proper measure. Otherwise, using totality as the *idea* against which imagination struggles seems arbitrary and even unwarranted, since, as part of an aesthetic theory, the sublime should focus on relations in perception. By contrast, if we take the *impression* of the abyss as one that *seems* infinite in apprehension and represents that concept (infinity) without a corresponding subsumption under totality, we come closer not only to Burke's earlier account but also to one that has more modern applications. This *apparent* boundlessness is the more suitable notion of infinity for interpreting the contemporary relevance of Kant's sublime, a boundlessness as it strikes the eye in perception. Kant himself says we must approach the sublime as the poets do. While, in confrontation with a massive abyss, we might *feel* a sense of being one small link in the infinite chain of universal measure, it is more plausible to interpret this feeling as an aesthetic response to environmental conditions (a response 'measured' by the human scale) than to the supersensible superiority of nature's ideas. In this way, "greatness" is thrown back onto the object itself rather than our own minds, which I suggest is the last place we're looking when taking pleasure in some of nature's more awesome features or events.

(iv)

Kant's notion of greatness applies not only to greatness of scale or dimension but also to strength and power as well. He defines power as might, as superior to great hindrances and also points out that dominion is a kind of might which is superior to another thing possessing might. 'Nature considered in an aesthetic judgement as might that has no dominion over us, is dynamically sublime.' (CJ 27, 109) The object or event inspiring the sublime feeling must be a source of fear but it must not induce fear. '[I]t is impossible to take delight in terror that is seriously entertained. Hence the agreeableness arising from the cessation of an uneasiness is a *state of joy*.' (CJ 27, 110) Kant's dynamically sublime feeling is very powerful since the experience of it 'raises the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover[s] within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature.' (CJ 27, 110) The imagination, in setting aside our usual concern with health, life and material goods, is raised in the sublime mind to an awareness of its proper sphere above nature, which has no dominion over us despite its strength. We sense ourselves as independent of nature, not in bodily needs or strength but in reason and understanding; we feel its power but inspire ourselves to rise above it.

Still, nature's power elicits a good deal of response from the observing subject, no matter how independent he or she may be: astonishment characterises the dynamically sublime.

[A]stonishment amounting almost to terror...when we are assured of our own safety, is not actual fear. Rather it is an attempt to gain access to it through imagination, for the purpose of feeling the might of this faculty in combining the movement of the mind thereby aroused with its serenity, and of thus being superior to internal and, therefore, to external nature, so far as the latter can have any bearing upon our feeling of well-being. (CJ 29, 120-21)

Kant draws a good distinction between the object in a sublime experience as a potential *source* of fear rather than something which actually *induces* fear. Astonishment is that which holds onto the sense of fear without being at all motivated by it: a feeling in the presence of an awesome object or event which nevertheless has no dominion over us. There can be a fine line between the sublime and the truly threatening, but the aesthetic impact *of* the astonishing object in experience depends upon the proximity of the two. If the object is *felt* at any time to be completely benign, it loses its might and hence its power to inspire the mind to its proper sublime stature.

In his account of the dynamically sublime Kant concentrates on the aloofness of mind which elevates the imagination to its supersensible vocation. In the sublime experience, the mind abandons sensibility - to internal as well as external nature - and employs itself on ideas of a higher finality. When this occurs, imagination is 'a might enabling us to assert our independence as against the influences of nature, to degrade what is great in respect of the latter to the level of what is little, and thus to locate the absolutely great only in the proper estate of the Subject.' (CJ 29, 121) Nature itself has no aesthetic power to please or arouse astonishment in this instance - Kant sees the 'shapeless mountain masses' in wild disarray as examples of 'uncouth dimensions of nature' - as it falls short, through space and time, of the unconditioned, and fails to represent the absolutely great, which reason (again!) demands. As with the mathematically sublime, we deal with nature as phenomenon, phenomenon exceeded by the sphere of mind. The physical presence of mighty nature does not itself inspire the sublime; under ordinary conditions it might well inspire self-protective terror. Rather, in the person susceptible to moral ideas, the sublime takes hold.

Therefore the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation, which we attribute to an Object of nature by a certain subreption (substitution of a respect for the Object in place of one for the idea of humanity in our own self - the Subject); and this feeling renders, as it were, intuitable the supremacy of our cognitive faculties over the greatest faculty of sensibility.' (CJ 27, 106)

In other words, the pleasurable feeling we have in the face of awesome events or objects has nothing to do with the objects or events themselves but rather with the success reason has in once again corralling imagination within its own purposes, by lifting it out of practical concerns in relation to the object. It almost goes without saying that this use of the word 'sublime' has little

bearing on any kind of *aesthetic* response. Consider the following passage.

Who would apply the term 'sublime' even to shapeless mountain masses towering one above the other in wild disorder, with their pyramids of ice, or to the dark tempestuous ocean, or such like things? But in the contemplation of them, without any regard for their form, the mind abandons itself to the imagination and to a reason placed, though quite apart from any definite end, in conjunction therewith, and merely broadening its view, and it feels itself elevated in its own estimate of itself in finding all the might of imagination still unequal to its ideas (CJ 26, 104)

I find it exceedingly difficult to believe that I would, upon encountering a vast mountain range or a dramatically stormy sea, 'degrade what is great in respect of the latter to the level of what is little', in order to locate the absolutely great in myself and my ideas of the supersensible (morality's dominion over nature). Kant *misplaces* his emphasis in the account of the dynamically sublime: exhilaration in the face of great objects stems from the physical, aesthetic relation between human presence and abilities, and the might of natural processes. When we're not directly threatened by them they can be awe-inspiring in a pleasurable sense. Kant's suggestion that the pleasure felt in the dynamically sublime is a reflection of our own sense of superiority in the face of nature's might, is experientially untrue. Asked what inspires our astonishment and awe, we are unlikely to answer, 'the knowledge of our own supersensible vocation!'

It is true, though, that we do bracket some sense of fear in sublimely aesthetic experience (balanced on a mountain ridge; standing out of doors in an electrical storm), and perhaps this bracketing might be interpreted as analogically similar to moral disinterest, where personal or practical concerns are discounted in favour of more universal considerations. However, even if this were so, the bracketing of fears in the sublime experience does not involve the level of choice required by morality (if the sublime object were truly threatening we wouldn't bracket the fear, we'd act on it as a sign that we ought to make ourselves safe): fear is not 'overlooked' in favour of a sublime experience, as personal interest is in morality.

The pleasure associated with sublime experience requires that a sense of fear be present without the actual presence of fear itself. One might, of course, 'swallow' one's fears in an attempt to have a sublime experience, that is, acknowledge but not act upon such fears, but it is doubtful that the experience would then be pleasurable. These are morally demanding choices, most of the time; but Kant's analogy between the sublime experience and morality is not based on the idea of pleasure. Rather, it is dependent upon the idea that reason displays its supersensible vocation in suppressing the practical response of imagination. My claim is that, even if moral choice necessitates 'bracketing' personal/practical interests in deference to more universal considerations,

the sublime experience does not require that we 'bracket' fear in the same way: either there is no real 'fear' to be repressed (in which case the analogy breaks down, since personal interest in morality *is* of real consequence), or real fears *are* repressed, with the result that pleasure can't find a genuine foothold (in which case there is no *aesthetic* dimension to the experience). People who show courage in the face of adversity are admirable indeed but I hasten to say that we admire them *because* they engage with what is not pleasurable or spontaneous; the absence of their pleasure in part defines their courage but it also excludes such activities from the realm of aesthetic consideration. And, since sublime instances of aesthetic pleasure don't really involve genuine fear, they are excluded from the kind of moral approbation we accord to courageous acts. As Mothersill comments, 'consciousness has its rewards but there is something ridiculous in preening ourselves on our superiority, as if it were somehow to our credit that whereas we know things about rocks, rocks don't know anything about us.' <sup>9</sup>

(v)

Mary McCloskey thinks that Kant's account of the sublime is valuable because 'it reveals how far Kant is from believing that there is one and only one feature or set of features by reference to which we can establish that a judgement is aesthetic, or that an object is of aesthetic value.' <sup>10</sup> This makes sense, and Kant's sublime certainly enlarges the possibilities for including nature in aesthetic assessments by privileging, if only in an indirect manner, the human scale in relation to the environment. However, Kant's tendency to unify the aesthetic and moral realms in an attempt to demonstrate the relevance of reason in a mechanistic world, is often strained, and nowhere is it more strained than in the discrepancy between the significance of form in beauty, and the presence of formlessness in the sublime.

Natural beauty, as we know, alludes to the possibility of nature's formal finality for human perception, and encourages moral behaviour by giving a suggestion of evidence that human beings can attain their ends in the natural world. If natural beauty, in exhibiting ideal formal finality for us, suggests a world conducive to our ends as moral beings, then how does Kant account for this world when it also holds objects that outrage the imagination, that mock the faculties in their apparent formlessness and disorder? ('There are *some* objects in the natural world which set the faculties in harmony. We'll just take these as evidence of a world conducive to our ends and politely ignore the evidence of outrageous formlessness.') Yet, Kant turns even formlessness to the advantage of the supersensible. Formless nature, with its suggestion of infinity, indicates our moral superiority since, in encounters *with* formless nature we are inspired to think either of the world in its totality or of our ever-present dominion over its might, despite the opposition of sense. Reason can employ even the most physically overwhelming and chaotic aspect of nature for its own



Remember that the sublime experience has the character of astonishment: Kant compares it to 'the awe and thrill of devout feeling, that takes hold of one when gazing upon the prospect of mountains ascending to heaven, deep ravines and torrents raging there, deep-shadowed solitudes that invite to brooding melancholy and the like'. (CJ 29, 120) Such devout feelings lead ultimately to the recognition of our supersensible vocation. This is a clever use of that 'formlessness' that gets left over when the beautiful 'forms' have been recognised, and the specifically spiritual dimension of Kant's description - the *devout* feeling in the presence of mountains ascending awkwardly to heaven - lends aesthetic plausibility to his interpretation of our relation to greatness. Not only is the world conducive to our ends but, in being faced with the greatness of nature's powerful presence, we are at the same time reminded of our ultimate unity with the ground of its being. Still, there is, I think, a small problem in taking Kant's account of beauty together with that of the sublime, as parts of one *coherent* aesthetic theory.

Form's alleged affirmation of a world conducive to our ends is *undermined by the presence of formlessness*. Even if we can, by referring to the different faculties of reason and understanding, cite form as supersensibly positive in one way, and formlessness as supersensibly positive in another (or at least as leading to a different version of supersensible awareness), we are nevertheless at pains to *unite* these opposite forces under one adequate explanation of the world's aesthetic indication of the supersensible. There is an arbitrariness in using opposite occasions to further the same end through different channels - the world's communication of or inspiration of our supersensible vocation at work - and I do not think that the emphasis on *different* faculties (the sublime as referring to the subsumption of imagination under reason; beauty as referring to the subsumption of imagination under understanding) completely explains or justifies this disturbing facet of Kant's theory. In using both form *and* formlessness to further our awareness of our supersensible vocation, Kant appears to have his cake and eat it too.

(vi)

However, if we move *away* from the moral/metaphysical side of Kant's account of the sublime, there is still something to be gleaned for contemporary theories of natural beauty. In locating the sublimely experiencing subject in *nature* most of the time, Kant indicates the unique power of the natural environment to evoke a certain *kind* of beauty - a *terrible* beauty, as many might call it. Rather than dislocate sublimity away from beauty in aesthetic appraisals, why not interpret Kant's sublime response as indicative of a particular *type* of aesthetic relation, a self-to-setting relation? In both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime, Kant continually relies

upon our understanding of, or sense of, the human scale at work in the world; that is, our sense of ourselves as *embodied* and, *as embodied*, standing in physical relation to our surroundings. He does, of course, discount the specifically *sensuous* dimension of that relation - smells, textures and tastes don't enter into Kant's aesthetic estimation of greatness - but this does not undermine the fundamental 'self-setting' assumptions made by Kant throughout the 'Analytic of the Sublime'. The 'all-embracing canopy of stars' (CJ 29, 122) embraces *something* (us); the 'shapeless mountain masses' appear shapeless in comparison to *something* (our vision as operating in close proximity to these masses).

In addition, Kant's examples of sublimity often involve situations or things that are more appropriately communities of objects, or events, rather than simple (physical or intentional) objects: the character of such objects or events is almost always presented in relation to our own needs and perspectives.

Bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piled up the vault of heaven, borne along with flashes and peals, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track, the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. (CJ 28, 110)

Seeing nature in relation to one's size or abilities indicates that such a seeing is *relational* : one figures out where one stands in such situations. This relationship between the observing subject and the natural environment, an implicitly sensuous or physical relationship in Kant's account of the sublime, can be brought forward to defend the choice of one approach - a 'self-to-setting' approach - to nature's beauty over others. While Kant himself does not develop it, there is evidence in his examples (as McCloskey claims) that the self-conscious position of human beings in the world allows them to take pleasure in their surroundings in a variety of ways. One of those ways involves a physical sense of oneself in relation to one's environment and, moreover, a sense of one's environment in relation to oneself.

In the previous chapter I attempted to demonstrate that Schopenhauer possesses an empirical sensitivity to the *environmental* character of nature's beauty (nature's forms please in fitting association and harmony). His account of the sublime reinforces his awareness of nature's environmental aesthetic character and, while operating within his own metaphysical framework, is a distinct echo of Kant's.

### 3. Schopenhauer: Salvation and the Sublime

Kant, as we recall, runs into some minor trouble with the theory of the sublime when he acknowledges its terribleness or threat, because sublime objects stand beside beautiful ones on the planet, and beautiful objects supposedly suggest a benign but inaccessible metaphysical ground that has 'planted' beauty for our aesthetic pleasure and moral ease (of course Kant stresses that the aesthetic is a reflective and not a deductive judgement, so any sense of 'planted' beauty is purely speculative - see the Introduction to the 'Critique of Teleological Judgement'). How can we cite beautiful objects as indicative of a supersensible ground of being but ignore the implications of their threatening, formless neighbours, without at least devising a theory which incorporates the two?

Schopenhauer, however, needn't struggle with such metaphysical ambiguities since his own metaphysical ground is explicitly acknowledged in all objects, be they beautiful or sublime or just plain uninteresting. He borrows instead the particular ideas about size and threat that make Kant's theory so powerful, as well as the change in subjective stance that Kant defends. The character of objects does not pose any difficulties for our understanding of Schopenhauer's sublime but his upholding of a change in subjective stance certainly does. Ideas are still involved (though the inappropriateness of these to nature, as discussed previously, still applies) but the way we get to them differs. Beauty encourages a spontaneous aesthetic response; the sublime challenges us to adopt it despite obvious disadvantages.

Most people, claims Schopenhauer, often perceive objects from the standpoint of relations. They do not like to be alone with nature because their knowledge remains subject to Will and nature seems 'of no use' to them. For such people, even beautiful surroundings have no effect on them. (WWR I, 38, 198) It is important, however, not to confuse some of Schopenhauer's more pessimistic reflections (or rants!) with what he seems truly to believe: that most human beings, if only for a moment, are capable of perceiving the world aesthetically. The genius might possess the talent for reflection and he might be able to sustain his vision long enough to give the Idea expression, but this does not exclude the ordinary observer from either the aesthetic experience of art, or that of nature (remember that, with reference to the latter, Schopenhauer does say directly that beautiful nature has an effect on even the most apathetic of observers). Yet, in the cases of art and beautiful nature, the scene is set, so to speak, to encourage our aesthetic response. Art does so by articulating Ideas beautifully in material, and nature elicits our response quite spontaneously through the beautiful arrangement of its forms. Nature of course does no conscious arranging; 'arrangements' are simply the product of ecological processes. How is it then, that some environments or objects strike us as sublime, and others as beautiful?

T.G. Taylor asserts that, according to Schopenhauer, one cannot *effect* the emancipation from Will, through aesthetic contemplation, by willing. Aesthetic consciousness 'is the spontaneous result of receiving strong perceptual stimulus so that the brain becomes overly excited and in this excited state is strong enough to overturn the Will.' <sup>12</sup> This makes perfect sense if we limit our discussion to beautiful objects but it does not pertain to the experience of the sublime at all, because in Schopenhauer's sublime one does exactly what Taylor says one cannot: effect the aesthetic response by a conscious removal of perception from relational purpose, even if one does not *set out* to have that response initially.

To describe the challenge of the sublime, Schopenhauer often relies on natural examples.

Let us transport ourselves to a very lonely region of boundless horizons, under a perfectly cloudless sky, trees and plants in the perfectly motionless air, no animals, no human beings, no moving masses of water, the profoundest silence. Such surroundings are as it were a summons to seriousness, to contemplation, with complete emancipation from all willing and its cravings. (WWR I, 39, 203)

A scene such as this one illustrates Schopenhauer's view of the sublime because it could easily frustrate one into boredom by its lifelessness - hence the challenge inherent in it, to perceive it aesthetically. However, Schopenhauer says it is an example of the sublime in a low degree, for there is no threat to survival but a sheer emptiness of Will; 'abandoned with shameful ignominy to the emptiness of the unoccupied will, to the torture and misery of boredom', (WWR I, 39 204) an individual in this situation can measure his intellectual worth by taking up the slight challenge to abide in aesthetic contemplation.

If we transfer ourselves to a barren desert, the challenge becomes more profound because 'the exaltation to pure knowledge comes about with a more decided emancipation from the interest of will, and by our persisting in the state of pure knowledge, the feeling of the sublime distinctly appears.' (WWR I, 39, 204) We *work* at sustaining aesthetic contemplation in the desert because the very character of the desert threatens our survival. With the beautiful, pure will-less knowing arises of itself without opposition by the mere disappearance of the will from consciousness. With the sublime, the state of aesthetic awareness arises by free, conscious exaltation above will, to which the contemplated object has an unfavourable relation.

Recall the passage in Kant's sublime, when he converts the aesthetic sense of sublime beauty into a feeling for one's own moral worth. I have noted that Kant's analogy between the moral and the sublimely aesthetic is untenable because of the differences among bracketing 'fear' in acts of courage, the *sense* of fear in sublime aesthetic pleasure, and the exclusion of personal interest in



moral decisions. Schopenhauer doesn't have the same problem here, for two reasons. The more obvious one is that he doesn't talk about moral status in relation to the sublime. For him, the restful state that results from contemplation of beauty is on a continuum with that generated by sublime contemplation, and both are united in their position apart from will. However, there is another reason why Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime doesn't invite the kind of problems Kant's does: Schopenhauer is unconcerned with the role of *pleasure* in aesthetic contemplation.

Schopenhauer seeks peaceful exhilaration borne of aesthetic awareness, rather than superiority borne of aesthetic pleasure. For this reason, there is no conflict between the kind of *courage* it takes to bracket *real* fears in Schopenhauer's sublime, and the exclusion of pleasure *from* such a bracketing. While Kant's account of the sublime as analogous to the moral fails because the analogy with the moral would demand that fears be overlooked in the same way as interests - and they cannot be, since real fears have no place in Kant's account of sublime pleasure - Schopenhauer's account of the sublime doesn't insist on the absence of genuine fears *or* the presence of pleasure in aesthetic judgement. Therefore, one might have to display genuine courage in order to reach that state of sublime appreciation that results in an absence of will and for Schopenhauer, such courage is itself is a kind of willing.

(ii)

In both the beautiful and the sublime the intellect is freely active without being directed by will. Due to this similarity, Bryan Magee calls the sublime a 'sub-class of the beautiful' but I believe he underestimates the role of Schopenhauer's individual in doing so.<sup>13</sup> The presence of a free and conscious *decision* to perceive in a certain manner distinguishes the sublime sharply from Schopenhauer's experience of the beautiful. One not only contemplates an object that is potentially hostile; one takes into account that object's conceptual relation to oneself *in deciding* to view it aesthetically. Therefore, the *individual* assesses their position within an environment and decides to adopt a specific attitude towards it. Once again, one retains an awareness of oneself as an individual in relation to other things but one adopts a perspective fitting of a transformed individual, one removed from concern with mundane relations in aesthetic observation.

Schopenhauer not only contrasts the sublime with the beautiful by emphasising the latter's dependence on conscious decision; he also differentiates them by virtue of a 'movement' towards sublime contemplation. He insists that the pure state of knowing is obtained through the sublime 'first of all by a conscious and violent tearing away from the relations of the same object...by a free exaltation, accompanied by consciousness, beyond the will and the knowledge related to it.' (WWR I, 39, 202) The exaltation is won and maintained by consciousness but the movement of

the will involved, says Schopenhauer, is more like a general human willing than an individual willing. As soon as concern for personal safety or usefulness enters the contemplation, the vision is destroyed. One must employ a *general* willing whose object is not the satisfaction of desires but the attainment of peace and contemplation. This concurs with my claim that the individual involved in aesthetic contemplation of the environment is a *transformed* one, rather than a forgotten one. A person must retain some aspects of individuality to make any conscious movement towards the sublime but at the same time they must abandon specific desires or non-aesthetic concerns in the process.

(iii)

The sublime as 'the exaltation beyond the hostile relation of the contemplated object to the will' (WWR I, 39, 202) has a curious corollary, namely, that there are several degrees of the sublime based on the level of threat imposed. Boredom is less threatening than, say, dying of thirst in the desert. Therefore, the degree of conscious strength needed to tear away from the threatening object will vary according to circumstances. Ultimately, one must ask this question of Schopenhauer: since the entire world is engaged in struggle against itself, one species against another, can't all objects in the world be seen as a threat to our particular concerns? Even though a beautiful plant can immediately provoke the aesthetic response in us are we not (in Schopenhauer's universe) aware that all things are engaged in struggle and that this plant is part of that struggle? If one accepts the more extreme aspects of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, then *any* instance of aesthetic response must be based in the sublime. Some occasions will push consciousness of threat into the background and hence appear spontaneously beautiful as opposed to distinctly sublime; but the threat and pessimism are there in all aspects of practical life and there seems no way to get around them.

In contemplation of the plant as representative of the world's struggle, or in contemplation of a more threatening object - a live volcano - one feels reduced to nothingness and 'yet revels in the pleasure of beholding' the object or scene. (WWR I, 39, 206) One's nothingness is not the sort of subject-less loss that we see in other parts of Schopenhauer's theory but rather an awareness that I, in relation to this object or this place, am *as an individual* reduced to a very low status, a semblance of nothingness. Yet, in spite of this, I am able to adopt the aesthetic attitude and observe the world peacefully. Rather than 'losing myself' in the contemplation of the world, I put myself into perspective in the environment, while at the same time apprehending the manifold without reference to my needs and desires. I am an individual member of the species *homo sapiens* with senses and a location in space and time, but I leave behind the specific desires and interests of my *particular* person and stand as one life form among many. I am simultaneously impetuous and

a dark impulse of willing, and an eternal free, pure subject of knowing, but I transcend the specific demands of willing and inhabit, through a more general human will, an aesthetic place in the universe. (WWR I, 39, 203)

In the obviously sublime the twofold nature of consciousness reaches its highest distinctness. A person simultaneously 'feels himself as individual, as the feeble phenomenon of will...and he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing.' (WWR I, 39, 204-205) The latter part of consciousness lifts the former out of its bonds to desires and cares, and brings it into line with the aesthetic detachment of pure knowing. It is important to remember that Schopenhauer attributes the ability to achieve pure knowing through the sublime to people in general and not only to genius. His remarks on the sublime have an inclusive tone to them and do not present the achievement of aesthetic consciousness in the sublime as something natural only to genius. Furthermore, the potential to transcend Will by willing the aesthetic response in certain situations appears to be inherent in the ability to think at all. If one can be aware of a threat, one has consciousness of it in relation to oneself. Schopenhauer says that consciousness is a bifurcate, with one half dwelling in will and the other capable of free exaltation above that. The sublime aesthetic response makes the bifurcated nature of consciousness *most distinct* (WWR I, 39, 204-205); this implies that the split exists in any case but is best brought to light through sublime contemplation.

This leads to two conclusions. One, consciousness is twofold in character and everyone has the potential to tap into will-lessness through the sublime response to the world. Two, the exaltation above the willing side of consciousness is done freely and with the awareness that one is doing so. The latter conclusion, I believe, can also be used to defend the ability of the ordinary person to attain aesthetic consciousness (Kant, of course, posits aesthetic awareness in the faculty of judgement, a component of every human mind, but Schopenhauer is not always so comprehensive in his attribution of capacity for aesthetic judgement). If the movement away from will can be effected by consciousness of sublime relations then there is no reason why ordinary people cannot be educated to adopt the aesthetic attitude when appropriate. In addition, we can broadly attribute something of the sublime to all objects in nature, and to the world itself, because all things are in metaphysical struggle. An awareness of this necessarily lurks behind even the spontaneous apprehension of the beautiful. Since Schopenhauer seems willing to allow ordinary people access to the sublime elements of aesthetic experience (which aesthetically are no different from beautiful objects; they differ *en route* of our seeing them), then if all objects are somewhat sublime in relation to us, then there is hope that we can move ourselves to contemplate them aesthetically - hope for aesthetic education.

Despite the domination of will over most of one's activities, one can be moved to aesthetic contemplation, and most effectively moved by nature. Once we establish the ability of a person to achieve 'pure' knowing, we can attribute to the person a bifurcated consciousness, with will ruling one part and pure knowing dwelling in another. Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime suggests strongly that one can wilfully adopt the aesthetic attitude but that one does so through a general, rather than a more self-oriented, type of willing (hence one cannot seek the aesthetic attitude *in order to* make a better life for oneself - personal desires impede the appearance of the beautiful/sublime). And, since one cannot be *dominated* by both will and will-lessness at the exact same time, one achieves in aesthetic awareness a transformed sense of one's individuality, where one is posited as one being among others but also a being unconcerned with his or her personal needs or desires. By restoring the individual, albeit a transformed one, to aesthetic awareness, we not only allow the full use of one's senses in appreciation but we make a place for the natural environment in aesthetic consciousness.

Schopenhauer excludes the environment from the theory of Ideas but as I have demonstrated, it works its way into unexplored corners of *The World as Will and Representation*. The transformed individual, furthermore, unites the world in representation. Without the individual, it seems to me that one's awareness of Will in all things, including oneself, is diminished. One must have and retain a sense of oneself as a human individual, and perceive oneself in that capacity aesthetically and in relation to other individuals. Schopenhauer does say that the beauty of nature presents itself as a manifold; there is little reason to think that the sensing, disinterested individual cannot be part of that manifold.

A few passages in Schopenhauer's treatment of the sublime indicate his belief in the metaphysical oneness of the world. During aesthetic awareness, one has a consciousness 'merely felt, that in some sense or other (made clear only by philosophy) we are one with the world, and are therefore not oppressed but exalted by its immensity.' (WWR I, 39, 205) Mountains and skies become a part of oneself in sublime aesthetic awareness; they no longer threaten to obliterate but are linked to one inextricably through one's sustained representation of them. This representation is accompanied by a feeling of having been transformed by it.

But how could the person who feels this regard himself as absolutely perishable in contrast to imperishable nature? Rather he will be moved by the consciousness of what the *Upanishad* of the Veda expresses: 'I am all this creation collectively, and besides me there exists no other being.' (WWR I, 34, 181)

In experiencing nature collectively and aesthetically, one feels oneself linked in a fundamental way



to the world, giving this world self-awareness in representation. And, feeling oneself as linked to the world, one is more easily able to forego (at least for a time) the focus on one's own personal interests and appetites.

Whereas Kant's account of the sublime looks away from the vast universe and towards our ability to conceive it (and hence our moral elevation above that universe), Schopenhauer's sublime allows a transformed individual - a person who is at once *conscious* of *being* an individual but remains *unaffected* by the practical concerns that normally define them - to stand in unity *with* the vast universe. The individual gives that universe meaning through self-awareness and yet acquires a new sense of individuality, one defined by other physical objects and forms in context. Schopenhauer suggests that the exhilaration felt in achieving a sublime attitude of mind leads to a further sort of exhilaration, one that expresses a feeling of unity with creation. Kant's theory cannot explain such a feeling: one reason for its failure to do so is the status of sublimity, representing as it does a formlessness over which we must exert our powers of categorisation. If we feel devout it is in respect of our spirit rather than the mountains. Schopenhauer, by contrast, presents the sublime as being on a continuum with the beautiful, requiring more effort but leading to a more profound aesthetic experience. In both accounts, the sense - the *physical* sense - of the human individual in the context of the natural environment is absolutely basic to an understanding of the sublime. While Kant and Schopenhauer diverge on the moral and metaphysical consequences of the sublime, they are united in their reliance on the 'human to habitat' (or self-to-setting) relation of experience. And each contributes some relevant concept to contemporary aesthetic theory. Kant extols most fully the physical sense of an environmental aesthetic and, despite his capitulation to moral analogies, his examples of sublime experience leave us with a strong impression of the natural world's power to astonish and yet please. Schopenhauer, whose examples of sublime exhilaration are not as overtly physical as Kant's, nevertheless illustrates the capacity of human beings to overcome the pressing demands of appetite and desire, in their responsiveness to aesthetic stimuli.

What they achieve with respect to scale, relation and disinterestedness, however, they lose with reference to sensuous awareness. Both Kant and Schopenhauer locate beauty's most obvious and powerful manifestations in the natural environment only to dislocate that beauty *as experienced* from some of its most constitutive properties. In other words, Kant and Schopenhauer reject the relevance of the 'lower senses' - smell, taste and touch - to aesthetics, and discount the more sensuous aspects of even sight. Before continuing to uncover Kant's and Schopenhauer's legacy to contemporary discussions about natural beauty, I shall pause briefly to consider the ramifications of their neglect in regard to sensation and the lower senses.

## II. THE NEGLECT OF SENSUOUS VARIETY

### 1. The Dismissal of Charms in Kant

Aesthetic pleasure, for Kant, occurs either in response to the apprehension of form, indicating a harmony between our faculties, or in light of our sublime awareness of our own moral victory over formlessness. Both types of pleasure are devoid of sense-content. Just as conceptual laws or ends must be avoided in the judgement of free beauty, so must pleasure based simply on the satisfaction of a desire. When pleasure is taken not in form strictly but in the sensuous surface of an object - its colour, scent or texture - then it is not the same kind of pleasure that accompanies judgement of the beautiful as the 'formal determinations of the unity of a manifold of sensations.' (CJ 14, 66) '...the mind not alone perceives by sense their effect in stimulating the organs, but also, by reflection, the regular play of impressions (and consequently the form in which different representations are united)'. (CJ 14, 66) The stress is on *reflective*, rather than empirical, or logical, judgement.

Form counts for everything and the 'charms' of the so-called 'lower senses' serve only to put form into a sort of bas-relief. Form occurs either in figure or in the play of sensations in time (sounds), and charms of colour, tone or touch have meaning only as 'they make this form more clearly, definitely, and completely intuitable, and besides stimulate the representation by their charm, as they excite and sustain the attention directed to the object itself.' (CJ 14, 68) Kant *does* acknowledge the supportive role of the lower senses but he excludes them from the object of judgement. In this way he differs from his predecessor Burke, who, while excluding smells or tastes from the realm of grand feelings, nevertheless allows them to be *part of* more composite and sophisticated aesthetic objects.<sup>14</sup> Burke's realisation of a *composite*, multi-sensuous beauty is, it seems to me, the natural consequent of an environmental approach to beauty. Kant, while taking an environmental attitude towards nature in his account of the sublime, nevertheless fails to extend it to the point of encompassing all sensuous manifestations of nature.

This is because Kant distinguishes what is merely agreeable in sensation (which can affect animals as well as people) from what is beautiful in mere apprehension and reflection. With the agreeable 'everyone has his own taste', because everyone has slightly different sensations due to differences in individual bodily constitution. 'This applies not only to the taste of the tongue, the palate, and the throat, but to what may with any one be agreeable to eye and ear.' (CJ 7, 51) Therefore, the agreeableness of a flower's smell gives it no claim to beauty: 'the judgement of taste consists precisely in a thing being called beautiful solely in respect of that quality in which it adapts itself to our mode of taking it in.' (CJ 32, 137) This 'mode' Kant refers to is simply the

limited application of sight and hearing.

The charms in natural beauty, which are to be found blended, as it were, so frequently with beauties of form, belong either to the modifications of light (in colouring) or of sound (in tones). For these are the only sensations which permit not merely of a feeling of the senses, but also of reflection upon the form of these modifications of sense, and so embody as it were a language in which nature speaks to us and which has the semblance of a higher meaning. (CJ 42, 161)

Kant limits the impact of the lower senses to their emotional effects or their relation to appetite rather than viewing them as composite parts of the natural environment. A theory more reflective of nature's real impact on us might take Kant's neglect of the lower senses as provocation for including them in a compositional approach to the beauty of the natural environment. Nature does have a multi-sensuous dimension, a dimension Kant ignores due to the demands of his epistemology (which requires judgement of forms to be a reflective process of mind, leading to intersubjective truth). However, it is not clear that a smell or texture cannot be beautiful or aesthetically pleasing, either by itself or as part of a more varied composition. Despite Kant's neglect of the lower senses, I shall argue for their importance as part of an environmental theory of beauty later in the thesis (Chapter 8).

## 2. Schopenhauer: Gravity, Vapours and Foam Forms

As discussed in the previous chapter, Schopenhauer takes one point of view regarding the metaphysical assessment of beauty (Ideas) and another in response to his experience of the natural environment. In an attempt to unite both perspectives, Georg Simmel, again in *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, suggests that Schopenhauer might have to admit 'that the Idea is not in itself "beautiful" but that beauty is what, with varying degrees of success, makes the Idea visible'.<sup>15</sup> This seems to support Schopenhauer's view of 'secondary beauty', where colours and textural appearance promote an immediate but metaphysically expendable beauty. Even taking the subtext into consideration, Schopenhauer does his best to dismiss the senses, sensation and sensuous variety from aesthetics. 'At bottom,' he warns, 'even form and colour, which are what is immediate in the apprehension of the Idea through perception, do not belong to the Idea, but are only the medium of its expression'. (WWR II, xxix, 364)

Schopenhauer is compelled to emphasise the inferior character of that material beauty which acts most immediately because that beauty involves senses and relations, aspects of individuality and the principle of sufficient reason. The visual activity of "seeing" is allowed because sight is the one sense, claims Schopenhauer, that is incapable of sensuous effects (pleasure or pain in the organ

as physically affected). Smells or tastes whet appetite; sight generally does not. Yet, visual *depiction of* objects which whet appetite can itself endanger the aesthetic response. The most extreme instance of Schopenhauer's beliefs on this topic are given in WWR I, 40, 208-209, where he derides Dutch still-life painting for being *too* life like and, hence, an instrument in the arousal of appetite. Painted fruit is okay, fruit being the natural further development of the flower.

But unfortunately we find, depicted with deceptive naturalness, prepared and served up dishes, oysters, herrings, crabs, bread and butter, beer, wine, and so on, all of which is wholly objectionable'. (WWR I, 40, 208)

The charming is 'everywhere to be avoided in art' for 'the charming or attractive draws the beholder down from pure contemplation...since it is necessarily stirs his will by objects that directly appeal to it.' (WWR, 40, 207-208) At best, these passages are an amusing tribute to the realism of Dutch still-life painting but at worst they are weak claims for the causal stimulation of hunger by works of a particularly gastronomic character. Were the claim correct, museums would have to locate their cafes in close proximity to Netherlandish collections, to accommodate the hordes of hungry spectators in sudden search of nourishment.

Another indication of the artificiality of dismissing sensuous appreciation from aesthetic contemplation is apparent in Schopenhauer's attachment to Ideas. We need to get to the Idea through the senses but once we're there we kick the ladder out from under us and dwell in contemplation devoid of sensuous content. I interpret this to mean something like looking at a rose, feeling the satin-like quality of its petals, avoiding the thorns, admiring the sheen of texture and resonance of colour, soaking in the sweet fragrance....and then shifting to a perspective that allows at most a line-drawing of a basic rose, stripped of the adornments which made it worth contemplating and certainly not including my individual relation to it. However, Schopenhauer himself, under the influence of Ideas and attempting to describe nature's aesthetic impact, is well able to illustrate the paucity of textural depth in the absence of sensuous content.

When clouds move, the figures they form are not essential, but indifferent to them. But that as elastic vapour they are pressed together, driven off, spread out, and torn apart by the force of the wind, this is their nature, this is the essence of the forces that are objectified in them, this is the Idea. The figures in each case are only for the individual observer. To the brook which rolls downwards over the stones, the eddies, waves, and foam-forms exhibited by it are indifferent and inessential; but that it follows gravity, and behaves as an inelastic, perfectly mobile, formless and transparent fluid, this is its essential nature, this, *if known through perception*, is the Idea. Those foam-forms exist only for us as long as we know as individuals. The ice on the window-pane is formed into crystals according to the laws of



crystallization, which reveal the essence of the natural force here appearing, which exhibit the Idea. But the trees and flowers formed by the ice on the window-pane are inessential, and exist only for us. (WWR I, 35, 182)

Elastic vapours? Gravity? Schopenhauer's account of an aesthetic apprehension of nature begins to sound like 'a passionate plea for the passionlessness, indifference, cowardice, the advocacy of the complete rejection from immersion in life, from struggle'.<sup>16</sup> Fortunately we have his subtext as an alternative account, one which reveals Schopenhauer's more empirical, individual assessments of nature's beauty. In addition, the very fact that Schopenhauer mentions foam forms and ice trees betrays his awareness of sensuous texture and our imaginative engagement with it. I intend to develop our imaginative engagement with the sensuous texture - acknowledged by both Kant and Schopenhauer but also rejected by both - in Chapters 7 and 8. However, at this point in the essay, Schopenhauer's fetish for vapours, gravity and unseen forces leads to another point of importance in Kant and Schopenhauer's aesthetic theories: their insistence on the non-scientific, non-logical character of aesthetic judgements.

### NOTES - CHAPTER THREE

- 1 Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 152.
- 2 Ibid., p. 163.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Arnold Berleant, 'The Aesthetics of Art and Nature' forthcoming in Salim Kemal (ed.), *Nature, Landscape and Art* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- 5 Crowther, p. 82.
- 6 Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, p. 236.
- 7 Crowther, p. 104.
- 8 Ibid., p. 105.
- 9 Mothersill, p. 236.
- 10 McCloskey, p. 104.
- 11 Crowther, p. 93.
- 12 T.G. Taylor, 'The Resolution of Schopenhauer's Great Contradiction', p. 99.
- 13 Bryan Magee, *Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, p. 164.
- 14 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), Part 2, section xxi, p.85
- 15 George Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, p. 88.
- 16 Bernard Bykhovsky, *Schopenhauer and the Ground of Existence* trans. Philip Moran (B.R. Gruner Publishing Company, 1984), p. 154.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FURTHER PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### I. THE REJECTION OF RULES AND PRINCIPLES

##### 1. The Independence of Aesthetic Judgement

In contemporary discussions about the aesthetics of the natural environment, the "scientific" approach - one which relies on the pronouncements of natural scientists as the standard for the correct appreciation of nature's beauty - seems particularly alienated from traditional accounts of beauty in philosophical aesthetics. This is because thinkers like Kant and Schopenhauer (and those influenced by them) stress the *singularity* of aesthetic judgements, the isolation of beauty or form from *ideas* about standards, rules or perfection. Schopenhauer's metaphysical system requires that aesthetic appreciation occur in defiance of the conceptual relations of practical reason, while Kant's critical philosophy depends upon judgement as a faculty distinct from the scientific mechanism of a Newtonian world, in order to create a space for moral freedom. While the metaphysical and epistemological theories of Kant and Schopenhauer may themselves, taken as a whole, appear superseded by the developments of modern science, this does not render obsolete their powerful discoveries about the unique character of the *aesthetic* in human affairs.

Kant clearly describes the conditions of understanding such that any *schema* they yield have little in common with the apprehensions of aesthetic judgement. Together with some like-minded remarks from Schopenhauer, Kant's thoughts on the independence of aesthetic judgement (as indicated by pleasure) from categories or rules of cognitive activity highlight the philosophical importance of *singularity* to judgements about nature's beauty - a singularity unshackled by the constraints of scientific reasoning (though benefiting from scientific insight), as I shall argue later in this essay.

##### 2. Kant and Singular Judgements

###### (i)

The beauties of nature inspire pleasure. This pleasure cannot be regarded *via* concepts as attached to representations of an object; it must be through reflective perception only that the pleasure is seen as conjoined with the representation. Like an empirical judgement, the feeling of

pleasure may be expected from all who judge the form of an object positively, but the feeling, unlike the empirical judgement, has no concept by which to guide its approbation. Pleasure is 'made the determining ground of this judgement by virtue of our consciousness of its resting simply upon reflection and the universal, though only subjective, conditions of the harmony of that reflection with the knowledge of objects generally, for which form of the Object is final.' (CJ Introduction, VII, 32) Kant wants not only to ground the judgement of forms on the pleasure we feel in reflection on them. He wants to make aesthetic judgement the condition for judgement generally, as it reflects correspondence between our faculties and the Objects of the world to which they are directed. When one looks at an object of nature or art, and one judges it beautiful independent of any interest, then one can, claims Kant, suppose the judgement to have universal validity. After all, if the mere contemplation of the representation of the object inspires the feeling of pleasure, one can attribute the feeling not to moral rectitude (this would be the good), not to sensation (this would be the agreeable), but to the mental state of free play between the faculties of imagination and understanding. And, since all (mentally normal) people possess the requisite faculties involved in this harmony - one needs imagination and understanding in order to think at all - one can base the universality of the judgement on the fact that the ground for the estimation of objects generally is the very ground of aesthetic judgement itself.

Yet, with the judgement of taste, 'consciousness of mere formal finality in the play of the cognitive faculties of the Subject... is the pleasure itself, because it involves...an internal causality (which is final) in respect of cognition generally, but without being limited to a definite cognition.' (CJ 12, 64) Without ulterior motive 'we dwell on the contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself'. In judgements of taste, the person judging dwells in the very act of judging itself, which is presumed possible in all thinking people. The pleasure that indicates such a dwelling we associate with the beautiful because beauty inspires this feeling without the contingency of concept or bare sensation; it occurs in the mere apprehension of the form of an object as represented.

For beauty is not a concept of the Object, and the judgement of taste is not a cognitive judgement. All that it holds out for is that we are justified in presupposing that the same subjective conditions of judgement which we find in ourselves are universally present in every man, and further that we have rightly subsumed the given Object under these conditions. (CJ 38, 147)

(ii)

Kant makes it clear that the intellectual modes of analysing an object differ markedly from the aesthetic experience of that same object. In Section 1 of *The Critique of Judgement* he



differentiates between cognitive and aesthetic judgements using an example from architecture.

To apprehend a regular and appropriate building with one's cognitive faculties, be the mode of representation clear or confused, is quite a different thing from being conscious of this representation with an accompanying sensation of delight. Here the representation is referred wholly to the Subject, and what is more to its feeling of life - under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure - and this forms the basis of a quite separate faculty of discriminating and estimating, that contributes nothing to knowledge. (CJ 1, 42)

Intellectual assessment leads to knowledge and indeed makes use of knowledge in its approach to the building. An aesthetic experience of the same building includes nothing of the sort: 'there is no other way for the subjective unity of the relation in question to make itself known than by sensation.' (CJ 9, 61)

As discussed in the previous section, the sensation of pleasure must not, for Kant, be mistaken for physical sensations as such. The sensation involved in aesthetic judgement refers to the harmony between a subject's faculties: pleasure, while felt, is neither "sensed" (literally) nor "known" (intellectually). It must be remembered that the objects themselves are not of so much concern to Kant as are our subjective response to the representation of these objects. We speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a quality in objects and the judgements involved logical but these judgements are aesthetic, referring for Kant only to the *representation of* the object to the subject. (CJ 6, 51)

Like the logical judgement, the judgement of taste is valid for all but this validity does not postulate the agreement of all, nor can it be derived from laws or principles. It can only *impute* the agreement of everyone, and stand as an *exemplary* judgement. It exemplifies a rule that cannot be formulated, for to formulate rules would be to subordinate judgements of taste to logical judgements and, hence, concepts. The imagination in aesthetic judgement must be subsumed under the *conditions* of the understanding in general; it must schematise without a concept. The judgement of taste is founded 'upon a mere sensation of the mutually quickening activity of the imagination in its *freedom*, and of the understanding with its *conformity to law*.' (CJ 35, 143) The pleasure arising from this activity, is from the free play of the faculties in which they seem to have a sense of purpose. This activity must, however, be limited to singular instances. The judgement of taste cannot extend to logical inferences and still sustain the unique feeling of pleasure, which "validates" the pure judgement.

Using flowers as an example as he often does in the third *Critique*, Kant declares in Section 8 that the judgement "this rose is beautiful" may not be extended into "roses in general are beautiful", for this would indicate the emergence of a conceptual judgement based on an aesthetic one. The beautiful manifests itself in response to the *form* of a *single* object; standards of rose perfection do not belong to the proper estimation of one rose, nor does the perfection of a few roses lead to any conclusion about roses generally. Perfection consists in the *objective finality* displayed internally or externally. While the qualitative perfection of a thing is the concept of its end, what it is to be, the quantitative perfection is the completeness of any thing after its kind, whether it has the requirements to make it an 'x'. 'Beauty, therefore, as a formal subjective finality, involves no thought whatsoever of a perfection of an object.' (CJ 15, 70)

Kant reiterates this claim in Section 33, when he uses tulips in place of roses to illustrate the difference between a logical and an aesthetic judgement. A general statement that "tulips are beautiful" must not influence the judgement of any particular tulip by a particular observer. Nor must the observer judge a single tulip beautiful in virtue of its perfection or with reference to a normal standard of tulip. To judge by either method involves measurement against a concept and refers to the object rather than the subject. In order to unite theoretical understanding and moral freedom, Kant must stress the *subjective* nature of the response to the beautiful. And, this stress on the subject, coupled with the rejection of conceptual "measurement" as an approach to aesthetic judgement, has relevance to contemporary aesthetic theories about nature. As I shall show in Part II of the thesis, theories which privilege science in aesthetic assessment of nature employ standards against which aesthetic response is to be measured. The problem with this, as I see it, is the diminishment of a truly *aesthetic* realm of knowledge and, in criticising scientific approaches to nature's beauty, I take my cues from Kant.

Again, without taking Kant's entire epistemology on board, we can still take seriously his defence of aesthetic judgement against scientific understanding: without articulating *how* science fails to influence aesthetic judgement in experience, Kant does justify the separation in theoretical terms through the distinct faculties of Understanding and Judgement. A further point to mention here, in anticipation of its being resurrected in Part II, is the role of *pleasure* in aesthetic judgement. Some thinkers (Mothersill in *Beauty Restored*, and Guy Sircello in *A New Theory of Beauty*, most prominently) insist on its presence as a part of what we mean when we speak of a judgement of taste. For Kant, aesthetic pleasure is tied to the subject's feeling for life, a

self-rewarding state. (CJ 1, 42) Others disregard it as a contingent and unnecessary aspect of aesthetic experience or understanding (Dabney Townsend in *Art and Its Objects* ). My own inclination is to make a middle path between these two poles but my path presupposes an acquaintance with Kant.

Put briefly, the *experience* of beauty, or the judgement of taste in Kant's sense, must be accompanied by pleasure in order to qualify *as* an avowal of beauty, for it is the pleasure itself that makes aesthetic contemplation a uniquely worthwhile human experience. Nevertheless, pleasure is not a necessary component in *criticism* or even *teaching*, as these evolve as practices. While these practices are derivative of the kind of pleasurable experience described by Kant, and function in service *to* this experience (by virtue of aiming at its promotion), they are more like the pedagogical process of making ideas clear, in their historical and contextual evolutions, than they are like judgements of beauty *per se*. But I won't give too much away here! I shall simply reiterate that the judgement of taste, as a *singularly* pleasurable judgement, is bound to concepts in neither form nor verification, but stands independently from the categories of science and reason. Its singularity is also definitive: one tulip does not a beautiful species make, but neither does a species-trait insure the beauty of a single individual.

### 3. Schopenhauer's Renegade Intellect

#### (i)

Schopenhauer also rejects the systemisation of aesthetic judgement, rejecting the scientific and discursive methods of analysing the world in terms of practical reason. Schopenhauer's stress on the disjunction of aesthetic "knowing" from reasoned "knowing" - of perception from conception - is more explicitly metaphysical than Kant's and hence more difficult to assimilate as a component in a contemporary aesthetic theory about nature. Nevertheless, his views are worth summarising here, for two reasons. One, Schopenhauer recognises the empirical difference between knowing through form and knowing through concepts - something that is basic to defining aesthetic appreciation as a different kind of experience to that of inductive or deductive reasoning. Two, his theory underscores the dominant presence of that difference so vehemently as to make it all the more incredible that aesthetic theorists privileging the role of science in aesthetic judgement ignore it, theorists who we think of as being able to draw on the history of philosophy in their work.

For Schopenhauer, a proper understanding of the world does not consist in scientific measure of the entire universe but in 'thoroughly investigating any individual thing, in that we try this to know and understand perfectly its true and peculiar nature', (WWR I, 25, 129) that is,

understanding the significance of representations. The manner of understanding is of great importance, for Schopenhauer does not reduce knowledge of representation to knowledge of standards or concepts. His theory is well expressed by Timothy Sprigge.

More and more we will find the recognition unavoidable that what scientists learn of the basic *forces* at work in nature, and of the *Laws* of nature that govern them...represents an external grasp upon the different sorts of will or drive which are what the phenomena exhibiting these forces, or falling under these laws, are in their own inner being.<sup>1</sup>

Schopenhauer's aesthetic seeks the inner essence of representation but he knows that he won't get there through the methods of science or math. To understand the significance of representation one must stand outside of ordinary consciousness, outside the impulse to measure and subdue. Short of asceticism, aesthetic appreciation is the only way to momentary salvation from the tumult of the world, the only route to meaningful comprehension beyond the tyranny of appetite or its soldier, reason.

(ii)

Philosophy, says Schopenhauer, has made an error, an error so large as to distort the emphasis of metaphysics up until his own writing. Prior to Schopenhauer, philosophy located the inner nature of humans in the intellect, in the self-conscious mind. This was done in order to distinguish human beings from other animals. However, Schopenhauer asserts that, not only are there no meaningful differences among all phenomena in the universe, but the intellect as the purveyor of consciousness is no more than an accident of our being. The Will remains metaphysically primary while intellect evolves as a tool for survival. As evidence of this Schopenhauer points to instinct in animals with limited knowledge: how else could animals manifest instincts for survival if Will did not give rise to the necessary aids? Will in animals and human beings is essentially the same thing but the requirements for its goal ( survival through various phenomena) are greater in humans than in some other animals, so humans developed intellect as a tool to serve Will. Nature, originally without self-consciousness, works its way up to this in humanity. Intellect serves the desire to survive: Will relies on it in the same way as 'the strong blind man carrying the sighted lame man on his shoulders.' (WWR II, xix,209)

Schopenhauer also refers to the strength of Will over intellect. Intellect, he claims, can be disturbed by the rumblings of Will but Will can never be hindered by intellect in pursuit of survival. The brain is nothing more than a guard for the aims of Will, and knowledge, no more than the generation of means to an end. Seeking the origin of the universe through knowledge



becomes a futile exercise since the world has made itself without the aid of knowledge, and knowledge presupposes the world. 'The intellect is conditioned by nature, resides therein, belongs thereto, and therefore cannot be set up in opposition to nature as something entirely foreign to it'. (WWR II, xxii, 287-288) Still, once the intellect has fulfilled its role and knowledge has furnished us with the means for survival (allowing disinterested contemplation), it becomes possible for knowledge to withdraw from subjective experience and exist purely for itself, as a clear mirror of the world. So, while the intellect can know nothing of the origin of the universe, it can nevertheless become unfaithful to its destiny and, in the mutiny against Will, comprehend the world's phenomena in calm, disinterested aesthetic contemplation. 'Will has, so to speak, secreted within its own being something that is not Will, and it can momentarily escape from itself in contemplating this secretion.'<sup>2</sup>

(iii)

The sort of contemplation involved in Will-less knowledge does not accord with the reasonable investigations of the sciences, mathematics or logic, for 'we can never with their assistance penetrate into the inner nature of things.' (WWR I, 24 121) To penetrate the inner essence of things, we engage in a peculiarly aesthetic way of knowing, one which peers at the essence of representations rather than skating on the surface of representational relations to ourselves (as beings seeking survival). The objective appearance of objects is, for Schopenhauer, their aesthetic appearance, i.e., their appearance without regard for our personal desires or needs, as well as without regard for the practical way of measuring or estimating them (science or logic). At first glance, reason indicates that the world is a place of strife and suffering, and that we must struggle to survive in this world. Yet, we have grounds for distrusting this reason, 'and this allows us to hope that non-rational means will give us a truer and happier account' of the universe.<sup>3</sup> In relinquishing our ordinary way of evaluating the world, we begin to consider the most adequate objectivity of the Will in representation; we penetrate the essence of phenomena.

Says Schopenhauer, 'When poets sing of a bright morning, of a beautiful evening, of a still moonlight night, and of many such things, the real object of their glorification is, unknown to them, the pure subject of knowing, called forth by those beauties of nature'. (WWR II xxx, 370) Aesthetic knowing is partly about oneself; scientific knowing purports to be about the *other*, uninfluenced by self. In this way Schopenhauer is similar to Kant: just as Kant gives pleasure as an indication of the subject's response to an object, Schopenhauer recognises that part of the aesthetic experience is the sense of feeling oneself *in* the experience of a beautiful object. And, aesthetic knowledge differs from reasoned understanding. Schopenhauer's entire metaphysics is built around the breach between the two. Even if we do not accept the metaphysical side of Schopenhauer's

thought, there is still much to be learned from his observations on the unique character of the aesthetic in human experience. Such an experience is distinct not only from those endeavours in which we seek to further our own personal goals but also from those bodies of knowledge which, appearing as objective and independent, are really designed to further human ends in a more abstract, universal fashion, i.e., through the acquisition of laws and rules which make the universe measurable and fathomable. This aspect of Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory - its insistence on differentiation between aesthetic engagement and practical or scientific engagement - has tremendous relevance to contemporary aesthetic theories about nature, and I shall develop it more extensively in Part 2 of the thesis.

## II. ART AS COMMUNICATION

### 1. Art and Society

Despite distinguishing aesthetic knowledge from scientific knowledge or deductive/inductive reasoning, neither Kant nor Schopenhauer bans conceptual assessment of beauty altogether. In Chapter 1 I discussed Kant's "free and dependent beauty" distinction, relying on Schaper's observation that dependent beauty, while informed by concepts, is not necessarily inferior to free beauty. After all, art's human origin provides it with an historical and cultural context, the recognition of which in the work requires comparison, interpretation and assimilation - conceptual activities on Kant's view. Yet, as Kemal argues, art has a crucial place in Kant's philosophy because it charts humanity's moral growth and becomes of more true importance to society in the process. The metaphysical Schopenhauer, as we have seen, praises art for facilitating objective knowledge and personal peace, redirecting our focus away from the illusion of progress and towards the thing in itself, the ground of all being. 'Art', believes Schopenhauer, 'is everywhere at its goal. For it plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world's course, and holds it isolated before it. This particular thing, which in that stream was an infinitesimal part, becomes for art a representative of the whole'. (WWR I, 36, 185)

For both Kant and Schopenhauer, art has a *special* role within aesthetics. Not only does it contain beautiful forms or facilitate apprehension of the Idea; art also functions as a means of communication in society. Art's social *context* allows it to communicate conceptually; it also helps to generate the special ideo-sensory character of art's properties (properties which embody ideas that can be perceived in concrete features) - properties that nature cannot share (I shall develop this in Chapter 7 and 9). Kant and Schopenhauer discuss the social role of art in their accounts of

genius and both accounts are similar in promoting art's isolation of objects and ideas in the world, i.e., art functioning as a frame, or a call for our attention not only to formal properties but to cultural and conceptual considerations as well. Any theory which proposes to locate a place for natural beauty within aesthetics must first, to my mind, grapple with the unique power of art to communicate *as well as* to please. This communicative aspect of art receives eloquent treatment in Kant and for this reason I shall, in making my point, rely on his own words (in translation) at length.

## 2. Kant and the Transformation of Nature in Art

### (i)

In his article on Kant's 'biased aesthetics', David Miall claims that Kant ignores the transformational power of art.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this appears to be true because Kant gives so many examples from nature in the *Critique of Judgement*, but Kant does provide a theory of genius in which nature is transformed and he also admits quite directly that art transforms the world for the observer. Kant claims, 'Where fine art evidences its superiority is in the beautiful description it gives of things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing.' (CJ 48, 173) Furthermore, he deems poetry to be the highest of the arts, the art in fact most distant from nature itself. Poetry invigorates the mind by letting it feel itself 'regarding and estimating nature as phenomenon in the light of aspects which nature of itself does not afford us in experience, either for sense or understanding'. (CJ 53, 192) Predictably for Kant, poetry presents nature as a schema for the supersensible but this does not undermine the fact that Kant grants transformational power to art. It transforms, for a start, nature and our view of nature. Art presents the world to us in new ways, symbolising at the same time our power to interact with and re-present the material of the world.

Mary McCloskey refers to this fact in asserting that, while natural objects are often used to show evidence of moral sensitivity, Kant 'does not maintain that beautiful and sublime natural objects are aesthetically superior to worthwhile works of art...people are insensitive to his fine distinctions.'<sup>5</sup> This is echoed by my own assertion that Kant does not impose a hierarchy between pure and impure judgements of taste. And, as Salim Kemal has shown, nature presupposes art in Kant's account (not mine) of natural beauty because one must understand art and its method of production (the free activity of human beings in a mechanised world) to grasp the notion of beauty. Expressing Kant's view, Kemal makes nature contingent on art for the following reason.

In our cultural and aesthetic experience fine art circumscribes our approach to nature and its beauty. We judge nature by criteria that

belong to art and its presupposition of free actions. Natural beauty at best merely augments our disposition to the good, especially by bringing to our attention the natural characteristics that are the aesthetic receptiveness of mind to the concept of duty.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, this does not need to be so - nature is often valued for its resemblance to art, but not always, and in addition there are many aspects of nature about which we are ineloquent. Furthermore, people who have perhaps had very little exposure to fine art nevertheless can be capable of very subtle and sophisticated sensitivities to nature. The point is, one mustn't look to Kant for either a justification of nature's superior or unique beauty, or for a standard of eloquence in relation to it.

At the end of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* Kant reveals his reason for making nature so prominent in his theory. Nature in its aesthetic capacity provides, for law-giving societies of diverse communities, a 'mean between higher culture and the modest worth of nature, that forms for taste also, as a sense common to all mankind, that true standard which no universal rules can supply.' (CJ 60, 227) Moreover, as society advances, 'nature will ever recede farther into the background...[for] taste is, in the ultimate analysis, a critical faculty that judges of the rendering of moral ideas in terms of sense'. (CJ 60, 227) Art will refer to those elements of nature that deserve our attention as expressions of moral freedom and at the same time will constitute the freedom in which all moral action consists. Kant's account of natural beauty shows that judgement is possible, but art evolves to improve that judgement. '[F]or only when sensibility is brought into harmony with moral feeling can genuine taste assume a definite unchangeable form.' (CJ 60, 227) For Kant the judgement of taste is universally communicable: the fundamental feeling of beauty is a 'public sense', where a common sense as *ideal* norm reflects the way our cognitive powers are attuned for cognition generally. (CJ 21/22, 83-84) In other words, the ability to judge of beauty is inherent in the ability to judge at all - hence *all individuals* are included in the community of taste and are thus subject to the implications about moral freedom and duty found in art.

(ii)

Art, more so than the beautiful in nature, has a function to fulfil in human society. Without the activity of genius (the artist) and the freedom that fine art symbolises, beauty's analogy with morality would be incomplete and the extent of beauty's influence on culture would be less. Because of this Salim Kemal asserts that we may reject the claim to natural beauty's superiority over art (in Kant), as well as its full participation 'in the progressive cultural task of producing and developing an aptitude for *setting* ends rather than merely responding to aesthetic ends.'<sup>7</sup> Artistic works are to be apprehended as the work of minds like our own and are seen as



embodying thoughts to which we can respond directly; natural beauty cannot express values or concepts in this intentional manner. Through art, we use form to communicate. The beautiful representation 'is properly only the form of the presentation of a concept, and the means by which the latter is universally communicated.' (CJ 48, 174)

Communication marks the existence of human society for Kant. He feels strongly that the empirical interest in the beautiful manifests itself only in society (contrast to Wordsworth, who in *The Prelude* admonishes society's maligning influence over response to beauty in the natural world). The impulse to decorate one's home is felt as a communication, towards others, of one's pleasure in objects : see Kant's example of the man on a desert island who would not decorate his hut were he alone. (CJ 41, 54) Art progresses from merely decorative function, consisting mostly of natural objects like flowers, sea-shells and feathers, to its higher forms which express our moral freedom in a social context through aesthetic ideas. Eventually, forms take the place of natural objects (which possess charms) and while there is no sensuous gratification involved, these forms become 'of moment in society and attract a considerable interest.'

Eventually, when civilization has reached its height it makes this work of communication almost the main business of refined inclination, and the entire value of sensations is placed in the degree to which they permit of universal communication. At this stage, then, even where the pleasure which each one has in an object is but insignificant and possesses of itself no conspicuous interest, still the idea of universal communicability almost indefinitely augments its value. (CJ 41, 156)

Natural beauty may indeed arouse an immediate interest by virtue of its conduciveness to our powers of judgement but as civilization advances, and humanity makes more use of the freedom supported by the existence of natural beauty, fine art becomes the focus of aesthetic experience. As Kant suggests, the mere intelligibility of art, its ideo-sensory character (which , again, I shall develop later), gives it an "edge" in the contest for our attention , because aesthetic ideas are tangible evidence of human freedom legislating ends in the world. Natural beauty can at best hint that the world is conducive to the cognitive powers of those who set the ends: in the sublime, it can merely provoke us into an awareness of our freedom.

Finally, art is able to *add to* experience, to create new worlds from the material of the existing one, and in creating new experiences art generates aesthetic ideas as a form of communication.

The imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) is a powerful agent for creating, as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature. It affords us entertainment where experience proves to be commonplace; and we even use it to remodel experience...By this means we get a sense of our freedom from the law

of association (which attaches to the empirical enjoyment of imagination), with the result that the material can be borrowed by us from nature in accordance with that law, but be worked up by us into something else - namely, that which surpasses nature.

Such representations of the imagination may be termed *ideas* . (CJ 49, 176)

The properties or attributes of 'remodelled nature', of works of art, present much more than formal relations; they *embody* and *express* ideas, values and emotions too expansive for ordinary language.

...something that gives the imagination an incentive to spread its flight over a whole host of kindred representations that provoke more thought than admits of expression in a concept determined by words. They furnish an *aesthetic idea*...with the proper function, however, of animating the mind by opening out for it a prospect into a field of kindred representations stretching beyond its ken. (CJ 49, 177-178)

Here, to my mind, is one of the most profound commentaries on the unique aesthetic value of art to human society: art, its attributes and aesthetic ideas (what I later call ideo-sensory properties) spin a web of infinite referential interaction, a means of communicating thoughts and emotions that is not limited to the rules and constructions of language as it operates in logical or scientific discourse. Conceptual relations and communication, furnished as they are by human imagination and creativity, are in aesthetics unique to art, and Kant states this explicitly throughout the third *Critique* . This is a factor to be kept in mind while carving out a unique place for *nature* in aesthetics. Any analogy between the two, for the purposes of aesthetic judgement, cannot be built upon the art historical/critical categories of art, for these emanate from art's unique ability to harness conceptual considerations, an ability not relevant in the least to nature.

### 3. Schopenhauer and Art as Language

#### (i)

In contrast to Kant, where all human beings are members of the community of taste, Schopenhauer says that the ordinary person, 'that manufactured article of nature which she daily produces in thousands, is not capable, at any rate continuously, of a consideration of things wholly disinterested in every sense, such as is contemplation proper.' (WWR I, 36, 187) Kant, at least, posits anyone's judgement as exemplary and potentially correct; Schopenhauer excludes most people altogether on the basis of their enslavement to the principle of sufficient reason. Art, however, can encourage the ordinary observer to see things aesthetically. Whereas I might see an

apple on a plate and wish to eat it, my desire thus tempted, I am more apt to see it aesthetically if I encounter it as the subject of a still-life painting. Of course, I might still see it as an aesthetic object when it is simply an apple on a plate in the kitchen but, according to Frederick Coppleston's interpretation of Schopenhauer, the ordinary person's appetites are too easily swayed and it is safer to encounter apples and the like as aesthetic objects through art (clearly Coppleston has momentarily forgotten Schopenhauer's diatribe against Dutch still-lives!).<sup>8</sup> Of course, Schopenhauer's ordinary person is not likely to appreciate *anything* for long but, even if the experience lasts only a fleeting moment, 'we are for the duration of that experience released from the tyranny under which we customarily live.'<sup>9</sup> Removed from the 'dross of the world', the object appears to us as it does to the genius, who raises it to levels of perception that we cannot attain, or at least sustain for any length of time (remember that Schopenhauer's account of the sublime gives strong indication of *everyone's* ability to adopt the aesthetic attitude).

The genius, unlike the ordinary person, can see 'not what nature has actually formed, but what she endeavoured to form, yet did not bring about, because of the conflict in her forms with one another.' (WWR I, 36, 186) The profound imagination of genius extends the mental horizon beyond objects actually present in nature, functioning in much the same way as Kant's imaginative faculty which is productive of aesthetic ideas. Ordinary observers do not see this potential but, as beholders of art, ordinary observers must in some sense share the potential for aesthetic contemplation with genius; otherwise, art would be meaningless. As Schopenhauer's theory of genius unfolds, the division between the executive side of aesthetics becomes sharply distinguished from the visionary, or contemplative, side. Perhaps (and this is true only of the metaphysical side of Schopenhauer) the ordinary observer cannot see Ideas as beautiful things existing in nature, as the genius can, but once the Ideas have been distilled from nature and expressed in art, the ordinary observer does have some capacity to perceive beauty. Therefore, genius (the artist) stands alone in being able to execute his vision. However, it is not clear that the ability to execute is necessary to the ability to perceive, or have the vision, in the first place.

Patrick Gardiner claims that Schopenhauer realises that 'important analogies do exist between the respective standpoints and attitudes of the creative artist and the receptive artistic beholder' and that the mental state of the aesthetic spectator finds its counterpart in the artistic frame. The frame 'surrounds a picture and holds it complete, isolated and self-sufficient, as something to be looked at in its own right; and the ability to adopt and preserve such an attitude is - it could be claimed - as much a condition of the creation of works of art as it is of their enjoyment and understanding.'<sup>10</sup> The ability of the artist to 'frame' an object in perception - to hold it isolated in contemplation - becomes a part of creativity; picture frames, time frames, galleries and museums make it easier for us than for the artist, but the concept or process is the same. This concurs with Schopenhauer's

thoughts on seeing the Idea in nature as isolated and removed from its worldly context.

Yet it can also be claimed that the artist *doesn't* perceive the Idea in a manner analogous to our seeing art in a frame or a special setting; he *expresses* the Idea so that we may see it as he wants us to, not necessarily as he did see it, powerfully isolated within nature. Coppleston offers a lucid explanation of the relation between creative execution and sustained perception in Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory.

...whatever verbal inconsistencies Schopenhauer may have been guilty of, his real view is doubtless that artistic genius comprises both the faculty of intuition and the faculty of creative expression (which latter is aided by technical and acquired knowledge), and that the non-genius, who is at the same time capable of aesthetic appreciation, shares to some degree in the first faculty, even though he is lacking in the second.<sup>11</sup>

The primary difference between genius and the ordinary observer is reflected in that between creating and apprehending Ideas. In this, art serves a specific function - making Ideas accessible to ordinary observers - and the understanding of this function leads to a new perspective from which to consider the role of Ideas in Schopenhauer's aesthetics.

(ii)

Schopenhauer calls art the kind of knowledge that considers Ideas. One adequate definition of art would thus be 'the way of considering things independently of the principle of sufficient reason'. (WWR I, 36, 185) Another variation would designate art the language of perception, that which puts Ideas into the firm and abiding possession of humanity.<sup>12</sup> However, unique to Schopenhauer is the notion that the experience of beauty can be both the subject of art *and* the result of art : the artist's expression of his *own experience* of beauty, rather than the beauty he apprehended, may be in fact what we observe in works of art. Again, what the artist apprehends is not necessarily the same thing that he expresses - what is *communicated* is his experience of some original beauty, which is then 'translated' through him for us. For Schopenhauer, the aesthetic experience *itself* is the subject of art, rather than any specific object depicted.

In other words, Schopenhauer's metaphysical text leads us to conclude that the genius, having experienced the Idea in powerful isolation within nature, *expresses* his own experience artistically. The work of art in turn communicates the experience of the Idea so effectively as to induce a (limited) aesthetic response from ordinary observers. Art articulates some initial contemplation, invites us to contemplate that contemplation and, in so doing, gives the aesthetic experience of art



a self-referential quality, recalling a more primary relationship between the artist and the Idea in nature. 'The apprehended Idea...is the only source of every genuine work of art. In its powerful originality it is drawn only from life itself, from nature'. (WWR I, 49, 235) I would suggest that, in reading Schopenhauer's text as a guide to natural beauty, we put the emphasis on the *apprehension*, rather than the expression, of the Idea. The powerful *originality* of Ideas emerges in an artist's *expression of* his experience, the result of his perception.

Art enlists imagination in its cause, indeed feeds off it: literal imitations of nature, paradoxically, lack life and thus (unless they are perfect replicas in all senses) fail to convey nature's aesthetic power. It might be argued here that the reason why visually-accurate wax imitations of persons or objects fail to please aesthetically, is that they lack any sense of *having been seen* by an individual. Strangely, this again injects the individual back into aesthetics: while the Idea may be free from the influence of individual interests, the expression of it in art bears the signature of an individual through its originality. The object is presented as having been seen in a certain light. The metaphysical Schopenhauer would probably contend that the artwork thus expressed the Idea as it was experienced purely, but then how would he account for, say, two equally moving but vastly different depictions of the same object or scene? If the Idea is the same but the expression of it different, then the individual must enter the equation somewhere. We can at least acknowledge that the individual re-emerges in the specific style of the artwork. Otherwise, it would lack imagination.

Because of this, artworks are as much about one individual's appreciation of the Idea, as about the source-object for that Idea. Therefore, Schopenhauer's art serves a dual purpose: it communicates the Idea to ordinary observers, through the artist's expression of his experience of the Idea in nature; and, it refers again and again to aesthetic experience itself, to the artist's encounter with the world and his communication of that world in concrete expression. While Schopenhauer locates the source of art in the Idea through nature, there is no reason why the Idea as apprehended in *art* could not itself be the source of *another* work of art (some of Peter Greenaway's films, for example, borrow tableaux from famous artworks to create an effective *mise-en scene*). Art's reference to art spins in more detail that web of perception and human meaning, enlarging the context of human communication. Again, nature, while a fitting object for works of art, cannot itself expand the web of meaning in an intentional way.

For both Kant and Schopenhauer, aesthetic ideas or Ideas evoke more than formal merit; they are intimately connected to, and constitutive of, a type of human communication that expresses thoughts and emotions without being at all limited to, or properly served by, discursive language and its rules. Ideas communicate in *representation* and, as such, evolve trains of thought too

extensive to be captured by concepts or strict formalism alone. Nature's beauty, powerful through perceptual properties of its own (which will be discussed in Chapter 8), nevertheless differs from the particular beauty of art by virtue of *lacking* that contextual web of human meaning which art communicates perceptually, and this difference is crucial to a properly conceived aesthetic theory.

### III. SHIFTS IN APPRECIATIVE PERCEPTION

#### 1. Dewey's Definition

Kant and, to a lesser degree, Schopenhauer, take up the issue of 'shifts in appreciative perception' in their writings on aesthetics. When something appears to be beautiful or aesthetically compelling under the assumption that it is a particular *kind* of thing, but it then turns out to be *another kind* of thing, we might experience what John Dewey calls a shift in appreciative perception. Dewey wasn't the first person to discern shifts in aesthetic emphasis based on a change in cognitive context, or origin, but his description of the phenomenon is perhaps the clearest, and worth quoting here.

Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that a finely wrought object, one whose texture and proportions are highly pleasing in perception, has been believed to be the product of some primitive people. Then there is discovered evidence that proves it to be an accidental natural product. As an external thing, it is now precisely what it was before. Yet at once it ceases to be a work of art and becomes a natural "curiosity". It now belongs in a museum of natural history, not in a museum of art. And the extraordinary thing is that the difference thus made is not one of just intellectual classification. A difference is made in appreciative perception and in a direct way.<sup>13</sup>

Before the shift, you take yourself to be appreciating a carving, and admire its 'texture and proportions' as the intentional results of human effort. After the shift, these same textures and proportions are seen as the products of forces like abrasion or erosion. The object not only falls into a different category of "origin", but its aesthetic features are perceived in a new context as well. For Dewey, the idea of an object's being art raises sympathetic responses in us which nature does not - an inversion of Kant's "immediate interest" in natural beauty. However, the important thing about Dewey's descriptions of shifts is its emphasis on a change in cognitive context, and the effect of that change on our perception of aesthetic features or properties.

An understanding of shifts in appreciative perception is relevant to contemporary debates about

the aesthetics of nature, for the question of whether nature's "naturalness" is a necessary component in the appreciation of its beauty has been taken up by several writers (Allen Carlson, Rob Elliot and Mary Mothersill, to name a few). I shall offer a response to the question about whether nature's naturalness matters in aesthetic appreciation of it in Chapters 5 and 6. Here, I shall discuss the ancestors of Dewey's shifts as they appear in the aesthetic theories of Kant and Schopenhauer. Kant focuses on shifts concerning nature, though ultimately the disappointment ensuing from his shifts has nothing to do with aesthetic properties. Schopenhauer's example is not drawn from nature but it can be introduced as a transition that paves the way to the second half of the thesis, where I begin to construct a theory of natural beauty woven around the five themes discussed in this chapter and the previous chapter.

## 1. Kant's Aesthetic Disillusionment

### (i)

Gadamer claims that Kant never asks about the type of object being judged, natural or artificial and that, in doing this, he ignores the operative problem in aesthetics, the significance of the beautiful. Gadamer thinks that beauty in art differs from beauty in nature, and that Kant fails to address this difference.<sup>14</sup> While it is true that Kant expends most of his energy in constructing a unified theory of beauty, I do not think that Gadamer is entirely correct about Kant and the differentiation of natural and artistic beauty. Kant *does* separate them, though perhaps not on the grounds that Gadamer would have him employ. Kant explicitly addresses the change in attitude that occurs when one is looking at, or listening to, something that one assumes to be natural, and which yet turns out to be art. Kant anticipates Dewey in one of his examples and, as I shall demonstrate, Kant's acknowledgement of a difference - though perhaps not a purely aesthetic difference - between art and nature is apparent in the third *Critique*.

Like Dewey Kant uses a "found object" to illustrate the art/nature dichotomy. His example in Section 43 is important because it shows *why* he makes the distinction between art and nature, and also how this distinction operates in the other examples of appreciative perception that will be presented.

If, as sometimes happens, in a search through a bog, we light on a piece of hewn wood, we do not say it is a product of nature but of art. Its producing cause had an end in view to which the object owes its form...But where anything is called absolutely a work of art, to distinguish it from a natural product, then some work of man is always understood. (CJ 43, 163)

In Chapter 1 I claim that Kant values nature because its beauty seems to point toward the possibility of exercising our ends in the world, by displaying forms which, despite their not being of our making, nevertheless promote the harmony of our faculties. Because art has its producing cause in us - because we design in accordance with an end, part of which may be to please - Kant cannot draw on the beauty of art to support his metaphysical or moral claims in the same way he can draw on nature. Therefore, only nature, as a product of the mechanistic world which pleases us, has the power to interest immediately. This power lies behind Kant's examples of shifts in appreciative perception.

(ii)

My favourite anecdote in the *Critique of Judgement* illustrates a shift in appreciative perception. Keep in mind, however, that Kant uses it to promote our immediate interest in nature for reasons other than aesthetic ones.

What do poets set more store on than the nightingale's bewitching and beautiful note, in a lonely thicket on a still summer evening by the soft light of the moon? And yet we have instances of how, where no such songster was to be found, a jovial host has played a trick on the guests with him on a visit to enjoy the country air, and has done so to their huge satisfaction, by hiding in a thicket a rogue of a youth who (with a reed or rush in his mouth) knew how to reproduce this note so as to hit off nature to perfection. (CJ 42, 162)

When the guests discover the fraud they no longer, in Kant's example, have an interest in the sounds, nor will they 'endure listening to this song that before was regarded as so attractive.' Kant claims that 'It must be nature, or mistaken by us for nature, to enable us to take an immediate *interest* in the beautiful as such'. While the immediacy of the interest is bound up with non-aesthetic factors (the *idea* of something's being natural), this story of Kant's is a good example of a shift in appreciative perception. And, shifts in appreciative perception between art and nature are important because they are often cited in contemporary debates about natural beauty. An attitude change, or cognitive shift, does take place when what one takes to be nature turns out to be art or artifice. The accompanying emotion, however, need not be disillusionment as it is in Kant's case (though there are cases where disillusionment would be appropriate) - I shall discuss this in Chapter 6 - but the change will certainly involve a change in perspective.

Mary Mothersill counters Kant's example with what she calls a 'Deweyan converse'. Acting on her belief that 'assumptions about origins and causal genesis of some item at hand, however well attested and secure they may be, are grounded on inference, whereas taking that item to be beautiful is not',<sup>15</sup> she asks us to consider the following.



I am invited to a recital by bird-call artists and feel pleased by the thought that a 'roguish youth' is producing these 'bewitching and beautiful notes', but then I discover that my jovial host has concealed a real nightingale in the shrubbery. Now 'I can no longer endure the song before regarded as so attractive'...The notes were the same, but we can no longer dwell fondly on the thought of the dedication and hours of practice put in by the 'roguish youth': it was just a dumb *bird*, making the only sounds it is equipped to make. <sup>16</sup>

Mothersill uses her recital example to show that Kant's own anecdote hides the presence of an 'impure' judgement of taste - the concept of what the thing was to be governed our appreciation. She also argues that 'feeling, perception, and belief influence one another in uncountably many different ways', that is, it is just as easy to be disappointed if art turns out to be nature, as vice-versa. <sup>17</sup> Mothersill doesn't think that the disillusionment Kant describes needs to occur: 'only if one's pleasure was grounded not in the aesthetic properties of the item but in the beliefs entertained about its origin', does the spectator feel disappointment. <sup>18</sup> (I shall argue for a modified version of this claim in Chapters 5 and 6)

Kant of course *does* give the power to interest immediately to nature and its origin, to support what that origin means to our mode of taking it in. The nightingale example is supposed to show that only nature can sustain our interest in such an enthralling, immediate way. However, another example from Kant suggests that even *he* did not think it necessary to become disillusioned when shifts of appreciative perception occur.

[W]ere we to play a trick on our lover of the beautiful, and plant in the ground artificial flowers (which can be made so as to look just like natural ones), and perch artfully carved birds on the branches of trees, and he were to find out how he had been taken in, the immediate interest which these things previously had for him would at once vanish - though, perhaps, a different interest might intervene in its stead, that, namely, of vanity in decorating his room with them for the eyes of others. (CJ 42, 158)

The sole basis of *immediate* interest is the thought that our reflection is on nature's handiwork. Yet, Kant proposes such immediacy for non-aesthetic reasons. Should the interest not be immediate, i.e., not be in nature, there can still be a judgement

...combined with an interest that is mediate, involving, namely, a reference to society; which latter affords no reliable indication of morally good habits of thought...

The superiority which natural beauty has over art, even where it is excelled by the latter in point of form, in yet being alone able to awaken immediate interest, accords with the refined and well-grounded

habits of thought of all men who have cultivated their moral feeling.  
(CJ 42, 158)

Mediate interest replace immediate ones, without obvious signs of disappointment, though the presence of the moral barometer is diminished. Still, for *aesthetic* purposes, the shift between nature and art does not necessarily entail disappointment, nor does it always seem necessary to appreciate an object in virtue of its origin if appreciation is to be *aesthetic*. I shall take this up in the ensuing chapter.

### 3. Schopenhauer's Sham Building

Schopenhauer also offers an example of a shift in appreciative perception. Speaking of the material of a building, he makes the following claim.

From what has been said, it is absolutely necessary for an understanding and aesthetic enjoyment of a work of architecture to have direct knowledge through perception of its matter as regards weight, rigidity and cohesion. Our pleasure in such a work would suddenly be greatly diminished by the disclosure that the building material was pumice-stone, for then it would strike us as a kind of sham building. We should be affected in almost the same way if we were told that it was only of wood, when we had assumed it to be stone...If we were told clearly that the building, the sight of which pleased us, consisted of entirely different materials of very unequal weight and consistency, but not distinguishable to the eye, the whole building would become as incapable of affording us pleasure as would a poem in a foreign language. (WWR I, 43, 215)

Would such a building disappoint us, once a shift in appreciative perception had occurred? Schopenhauer's example raises an extremely important issue in aesthetics generally, and one with special relevance to the aesthetics of nature: to what degree do non-perceptual factors enter into judgements about beauty? Furthermore, to what degree *should* non-perceptual considerations 'count' in public critical assessments? I take up Schopenhauer's example in the following chapter and challenge its conclusions.

My challenge relies, as will my claims in Part 2 of the thesis, on conclusions drawn in this chapter and the ones preceding it. Kant and Schopenhauer *do* raise several issues that are, or ought to be, a part of contemporary discussion about the aesthetics of the natural environment. Each of these issues - shifts in appreciative perception; the differentiation of scientific reasoning and aesthetic appreciation; the role of art in society; the neglected senses and the concept of the sublime; the environmental character of beauty; the differentiation of conceptual and non-conceptual judgement - contributes greatly to a clarified understanding of nature's *particular*

beauty. Of course, these contributions have for the most part remained obscured beneath misinterpretations about the aesthetic theories of Kant and Schopenhauer: the ground having been cleared, I hope, of some misconstruals, these other, less celebrated ideas can begin to take root. Without governing the internal structure of each of the following chapters (unlike the external structure, where the *topic* of each chapter is an intellectual descendent of one or more of the major themes considered here), the ideas brought out in Part I will appear again and again, in almost cyclical fashion, as I develop my own claims about the beauty of nature. The first of these claims, following from the most recent topic introduced through Kant and Schopenhauer, concerns non-perceptual factors and shifts in appreciative perception.

## NOTES - CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 Timothy Sprigge, *Theories of Existence* (Penguin Books, 1984), p. 81.
- 2 Ibid., p. 89.
- 3 Julian Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, p. 77.
- 4 David K. Miall, 'Kant's *Critique of Judgement* : A Biased Aesthetics' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 20(2): 135-146, Spring 1980, p. 145.
- 5 Mary McCloskey, *Kant's Aesthetic*, p. 2.
- 6 Salim Kemal, *Kant and Fine Art* , p. 19.
- 7 Ibid., p. 95.
- 8 Frederick Copleston, *Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism* (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd., 1946), p. 108.
- 9 Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, p. 171.
- 10 Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Penguin, 1966), pp. 201-202.
- 11 Copleston, p. 114.
- 12 Gardiner, p. 190.
- 13 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), pp. 48-49.
- 14 Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* , p. 46.
- 15 Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* , p. 390.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 392-393. It should be noted here that Kant simply does not go in for imitation. In an earlier passage to the one quoted above he notes that the beauty of a bird's song, 'if exactly imitated by man (as has sometimes been done with the notes of nightingales) it would strike our ear as wholly destitute of taste.' (CJ 22, 89). Hegel agrees. Commenting on Kant's nightingale example , he claims to prefer the bird itself to an imitation of it: 'it befits man better to take delight in what he produces out of himself. In this sense the discovery of an insignificant technical product has higher value, and man can be prouder of having invented the hammer, the nail, etc., than of manufacturing tricks of imitation'. See Hegel, *Introduction to Aesthetics* , p. 43.
- 17 Mothersill, p. 393.
- 18 Ibid., p. 391.



## PART 2

### CHAPTER FIVE

#### NON-PERCEPTUAL FACTORS AND AESTHETIC JUDGEMENTS ABOUT NATURE

##### I. AESTHETICS AND PLURALISM

###### 1. Stating the Problem

Philosophers who wish to clarify the character of aesthetic judgements about nature have a difficult task in attempting to define the place of non-perceptual factors or cognitive considerations in assessing nature's particular beauty. There can be no question that such factors are often present in appreciation, nor can it be denied that they influence or inform responses in a distinctly powerful way. What remains unclear is the extent to which they can be admitted as components of, or reasons for, a considered and serious aesthetic judgement about the natural environment.

The problem sometimes manifests itself when one justifies one's aesthetic judgement to another person. Do I find that tree beautiful because of its texture, appearance, scent and the sound of its branches in the wind? Or does my judgement of it reflect, more so than any of these perceptual facets, the fact that I have watched the tree grow from a sapling? Certainly the latter fact would increase the odds of genuine aesthetic appreciation and depth of acquaintance, given perception over time and through a variety of circumstances. Yet, if the primary reason for finding *this* tree beautiful in *this* spot is that I have watched it grow for two decades (perhaps the local authority has just transplanted a dozen similarly mature trees in the vicinity), can I still argue that my judgement is an aesthetic one? Or must I shift my approach in order to acknowledge that the object of my admiration is not so much a set of perceptual features as a symbolic or nostalgic response to the object?

I'm making a broad assumption here, namely, that the local authority trees do not blight the original setting for my tree and that they are largely indistinguishable from each other unless examined very closely. It is, again, quite possible that my intimate acquaintance with my tree will allow me not only to pick it out from among the crowd, so to speak, but to discern its unique aesthetic features as well. This latter possibility might then insure that I could argue persuasively for the unique beauty of my tree. For the moment, though, let's suppose that I fail a test to distinguish my tree from the others and that I still insist on calling my tree beautiful once someone

else picks it out for me. My judgement would then be based on my personal affection for the tree or some other such factor: the failure to reidentify my tree on the basis of its perceptual features alone indicates a lack of familiarity with its *aesthetic* particularity. This leads to the question about what we mean when we refer to the aesthetic character of an object or the natural environment. Does *aesthetic* refer to a thing's perceptual or sensuous features, or does it embrace more multifarious elements in judgement, thus obscuring what we mean when we use the term?

Before confronting this issue, I will make a claim that I develop continuously throughout the thesis: judgements about the beauty of nature are not necessarily legitimised by practices which are germane to the criticism and history of art. Art history and criticism include, among other things, a complex web of ideas and meanings to which art objects may refer or be related in some way. Kant and Schopenhauer discuss the beauty of nature without for a moment denying art's power to communicate as well as to please, or assimilating nature into art. Art, in the communicative sense expounded by them, serves not only as an object for contemplation (in virtue of the sensuous/formal surface) but also as a mode of individual expression which is universally communicable. The natural environment lacks the *literally* expressive or communicative capacity possessed by most artworks - does this then exclude nature from the province of the aesthetic?

The term *aesthetic* is used freely to denote both aspects of art - the surface/perceptual and the communicative/conceptual - and in light of this nature is often taken to be deficient in the resources necessary to inspire a profound aesthetic response. Some critics try to remedy this by providing nature with a cultural context for the purpose of validating judgement: they appreciate nature in a manner derived from and appropriate to the history and theory of art. My inclination is to do just the opposite and to claim that the term *aesthetic*, while sufficiently broad to include all sorts of objects and events, has been too readily equated with the philosophy of art, thus diminishing its specifically perceptual character. Especially misleading is the idea that the cultural or historical context of art can be applied by analogy to nature, for it is far from certain that these sorts of considerations are definitive of the aesthetic in regard to art in the first place. By examining the role of non-perceptual or cognitive factors in aesthetic experience (and eventually drawing on the idea of shifts in appreciative perception based on such considerations), one can attempt to distil what is aesthetic about an experience from the factors supportive of it.

## 2. The Character of the Aesthetic

### (i)

The community of taste, despite being marked by shared senses among human beings, is by no

means a homogenous gathering (this being, of course, one of Kant's main reasons for rejecting the lower senses from aesthetic judgement - people have widely different sense experiences - CJ 14, 66). In addition to the normal variations in physical ability found among different people and their sense perceptions, there are variations in the way people *direct* their senses. Geographer Edmund Penning-Rowsell cites the broad range of influences on taste.

We recognize a plethora of influences on landscape preferences and prejudices: history; culture; social class; landscape function or use; personality and, perhaps, our biological base. What is needed is a form of conceptual map to help classify this maze of influences, and perhaps some mechanism or insight with which to weigh their various significances.<sup>1</sup>

In calling for a map to navigate the maze of influences, for insight into how we can 'weigh' the significance of various phenomena, Penning-Rowsell sets the stage for presenting two opposing viewpoints on the map-making. No one would deny the influence of non-perceptual factors on the development of taste but whether or not such influences should be admitted as constituent components of an aesthetic judgement about nature - a judgement given in some kind of public critical practice - is another issue.

(ii)

Those who hold one viewpoint welcome the intrusion of non-perceptual factors into aesthetic judgements about the natural environment. I shall call this viewpoint the *interdependence* position. It has been expressed in a number of ways advocating a number of influences but perhaps the most familiar statement of it has been given by Mary Carman Rose in her short essay 'Nature as Aesthetic Object: An Essay in Meta-Aesthetics'.<sup>2</sup> Rather than engage in 'aesthetics from below', where aesthetics is philosophically isolated from other areas of inquiry, Rose supports practising 'aesthetics from above', where aesthetic issues are analysed in light of values and convictions, as well as in relation to other academic subjects. Rose hopes that the adoption of an interactive, interdisciplinary viewpoint will expand the range of influence of aesthetics itself, as well as bring new factors into aesthetic judgement. While she does not offer any specific program for incorporating values or other disciplines into the aesthetics of nature, it is clear that she wishes to validate interpretations of nature's beauty by providing us with the scope to make judgements based on a variety of influences. This would bring aesthetic experiences of nature into line with those of art, since in justifying our judgements about either we could refer to specific non-perceptual factors in the creation of the experience.

Others have taken Rose at her word and have developed theories within which the

interdependent character of nature's aesthetic worth is prominent. Allen Carlson privileges ecology and the natural sciences in his claim that an accurate assessment of nature's beauty must blend aesthetic sensitivity with scientific skill. He recognises that social factors also play a role in influencing judgement, defining aesthetic quality as a mixture of 'physical properties and social values'.<sup>3</sup> Carlson argues for the adoption of scientific guidelines in assessing nature's beauty because he sees 'a loss of precision which occurs in transferring the concept of the aesthetic from the art world to the physical realm'.<sup>4</sup> There is, I think, a lack of precision in critical writing about the beauty of nature but the adoption of scientific categories of classification is not to my mind the way to remedy the situation (as Kant and Schopenhauer would readily agree - I shall return to defend this claim at a later stage).

Nevertheless, Carlson is not alone in attempting to harness non-perceptual/conceptual factors for the purpose of validating aesthetic judgements about the natural environment. Many environmental ethicists agree with Duane Willard's conclusion, namely that 'it seems more intelligible to hold that the experience of natural beauty is a relative affair', conditioned by a mixture of cultural, physical and personal factors.<sup>5</sup> Such thinkers would have us look to the commonly held views of local people in order to measure the correctness of aesthetic judgements. Others, often geographers, urge us to move away from a strictly topographical analysis of landscape towards an appreciation which 'throws more light on the less affecting and less self-conscious moments of landscape experience'.<sup>6</sup> Most critics and scholars who advocate the interdependence position agree that the appreciation of the natural environment reflects our awareness of the way in which sensuous features are integrated with or indicative of cultural/historical/scientific/personal backgrounds of experience.

Yuriko Saito, in her excellent (unpublished) dissertation *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Western and Japanese Perspectives and Their Ethical Implications*, claims that 'relativism in interpretation and appreciation...is inevitable regarding the aesthetic appreciation of nature'. Except for misinformation, says Saito, no conceptual considerations are inappropriate to judgements about nature's beauty.<sup>7</sup> Saito thinks that the unified character of social and sensory elements in the environment leads us to experience a 'sense of place', which she cites as the specifically aesthetic dimension of the experience of nature. She also provides a rough guideline for integrating conceptual and perceptual factors in judgement, something which very few thinkers do, and I shall return to her theory in a moment. However, before analysing the interdependent viewpoint on the aesthetics of nature I would like to present the opposing viewpoint, which I shall call the *perceptual* position.



F.E. Sparshott gives a succinct statement of the position in his essay 'Figuring the Ground'.

[T]he aesthetic aspects of anything are those aspects whereby it pleases or displeases, is assigned positive or negative value, in virtue of the way it appears to the perceiver without regard to other considerations.<sup>8</sup>

Mary Warnock, like Sparshott, adopts the perceptual viewpoint and does so in a manner reminiscent of Kant. She offers these views on the aesthetic object.

The judgement of it is aesthetic in a literal sense, that is, it is a judgement of how the thing *looks* or *sounds*. It is not intellectual. We do not identify the object as a member of a certain class of objects when we judge it aesthetically. We do not classify it as having certain characteristics or falling under certain scientific laws. Our perception, as it were, stops at the appearance of the thing and it is within that limit that we discover its finality.<sup>9</sup>

Warnock's position is emphatic in its insistence of what belongs to *judgement*: while she does not rule out the use of conceptual considerations for teaching purposes, she is adamant that the act of judging (and giving reasons for that judgement) has a unique character, one that is wholly based in appearance. An 'inner finality' of form is determined by a pattern of properties wholly internal to the object or place itself. Non-perceptual factors remain at the periphery of judgement, in the region before and after aesthetic assessment (or in Kant's category of impure judgements of taste). We see in Sparshott and Warnock an unwillingness to sacrifice that which is uniquely aesthetic for the sake of justifying judgements about nature, judgements made in a manner analogous to those of art. Their insistence on the particularity of the concept *aesthetic* brings to light the idea that, for the larger field of endeavour known as Aesthetics to become interactive with other fields of inquiry - for the aesthetic to be interdependent with cultural, social or scientific considerations - there must be a distinct province of the aesthetic with which other disciplines or factors intersect.

With reference to nature, the perceptual viewpoint reveals the weakness of the interdependent viewpoint by focusing on the perceptual aspect of aesthetic judgements: our perceptions adhere to a thing, a place before us, an entity that can be perceived and given in appearance. Too much emphasis on conceptual and non-perceptual considerations belittles the prominence of the appearance itself, which is attached to a physical object, event or state of affairs in the world.

Interdependent accounts of what is properly aesthetic neglect the importance of the sensuous in the experience in nature. Rather than looking to non-perceptual frames of reference in order to rectify the sloppiness of critical writing about environmental aesthetics, scholars should perhaps encourage observers to direct their senses in a manner more appropriate to the texture of the natural world. Nature, for example, affords opportunities for multi-sensuous aesthetic experience. Without tethering our judgements to the physical object or place before us we are in danger of confusing reverie with aesthetic appreciation.<sup>10</sup> Interdependent accounts of nature's aesthetic worth often fail to explain *how* cultural or scientific factors enter into or guide judgement; they fail to provide a safeguard against mere daydreaming, nostalgia or moodiness when invoking the associative influence of non-perceptual factors.

Yet, the perceptual position as expressed by Sparshott and Warnock also has a weakness: it fails to meet the challenge posed to aesthetic theory by conceptual and other non-perceptual considerations. Associations external to the object or place itself can exert an extremely powerful influence over one's aesthetic response. In respect of this we must ask when, if ever, non-perceptual factors should be allowed as *legitimate* components of an aesthetic judgement about nature. The perceptual viewpoint, for example, overlooks the pedagogical potential of non-perceptual frameworks in relation to nature's beauty. It might answer that, by allowing any old concept to validate a judgement, we undermine the sort of rigour we seek for philosophical aesthetics. But, by denying the possibility of non-perceptual influence at all, we practise aesthetics in a vacuum.

While agreeing with Sparshott and Warnock about the essence of the aesthetic - that the aesthetic is concerned with that which gives itself in appearance to the senses - I also think that the power of non-perceptual influences on aesthetic appreciation requires clarification. Conceptual/non-perceptual influences on our appreciation of natural beauty should not be given as reasons in a critical aesthetic judgement but neither should they be shunned altogether. At the very least they have a pedagogical function. Further analysis will, I believe, raise some difficult questions about what does and does not belong in a judgement about the beauty of nature, including the issue of whether nature's 'naturalness' must be an explicitly certain factor in aesthetic experiences of it.

### 3. Cultural Accounts of Natural Beauty

#### (i)

Many of our attitudes towards the environment are culturally generated, not only in the sense

that we prefer certain places to others in accordance with local prejudices but also in the more powerful sense that *what* we are able to perceive in the first place is a possibility yielded by developed conceptual and linguistic patterns. Finding a flower or a grove of trees beautiful often presupposes that I recognise the object or place *as* a flower or grove of trees. I say that such a response 'often presupposes' because young children undoubtedly have aesthetic responses to the world without being able to differentiate objects in a sophisticated manner: they find *that thing* beautiful and may perhaps be told the name of what it is. It is not that our perceptual abilities are limited to those patterns with which we are familiar <sup>11</sup> but rather that what we do tend to observe in practice are those patterns with which we have been made familiar, whether by individual acquaintance or education. Of course, the radically different tends to grab our attention more forcefully than the readily familiar but the readily familiar conditions our taste and, when left unchallenged or undeveloped, stultifies the exercise of perception such that we do not notice or appreciate objects or places that stand beyond the patterns of our ordinary experience.

The idea of a conceptual pattern that directs perceptual focus is a vague one but it can be elucidated by considering the way language and lifestyle interact to yield a set of aesthetic terms and referents ( or ordinary terms and referents which function aesthetically). Individuals live in different places and different societies. The topography of their communities and the way they interact with their environment for survival will determine to some degree what sorts of things people have words for. Language reduces and simplifies the complexity of an environment so that necessary communication can take place but the local character of the emergent words limits the degree to which untutored outsiders can grasp their meanings. Perception of the environment involves factors that are locally or culturally specific: breaking out of the patterns that emerge from these can be as difficult as communicating them to an outsider.

Thomas Saarinen, in a publication for the Association of American Geographers, addresses the interaction of language and perception with an example drawn from Eskimo culture.

In the process of adjusting to environment each culture selects from an infinite array of possibilities a certain set of categories to describe and explain what is there. These categories become part of a system of communication and a structure for communicating to succeeding generations, which aspects of the environment one attended to. A familiar example is the contrast between English with only one word for snow and the Eskimo language with a great variety of words indicating different qualities such as falling snow, snow on the ground, snow packed like ice, slushy snow, wind-driven flying snow, and so on.  
12

The importance of snow to Eskimo culture is indicated by the fact that, while we might sometimes

attach modifiers to the general word for wet but solid precipitation, Eskimos *think* of snow not as one entity but as many different types of precipitation, perhaps with the same degree of differentiation that we might use for hail and snow. What a person is able to observe depends heavily, though not exclusively, upon what he or she takes to be out there.

Some thinkers would maintain that perception relies *entirely* upon cultural influence and conceptual patterns that emerge from it. P.T Newby defines landscape as an entity that is predominantly human-made, not of nature but rather something that 'lies at the interface between nature and the activities of man...predominantly the product of the means by which man satisfies basic drives and social needs.' <sup>13</sup> Bracketing for a moment the problems that arise in equating 'landscape' with the natural environment, we see that Newby views landscape as 'the embodiment of a cultural heritage and social values, rather than a form or surface provided by nature'. <sup>14</sup> Meaningful landscapes are those in which we take an interest and Newby believes that our interest is culturally based. This theory enjoys great popularity among theorists of the interdependent viewpoint: it seems to provide us with a way of explaining aesthetic responses to the natural environment. I find it a puzzling view, given the inherent flexibility of language if not of culture. Local or national cultures do influence the way we think about the natural environment but I see no reason why individual appreciation is limited to or defined exclusively by these influences.

Furthermore, Newby's idea of landscape appreciation neglects the powerful possibility of a truly *aesthetic* response to it : can't a landscape come to have meaning because, and sometimes primarily because, it strikes us as beautiful? Newby would, I think, say that the reason we find it beautiful is either because it somehow fits our culturally-informed ideas of beauty or because it reminds us of some aspect of an already-meaningful landscape. He leaves out the frequent occurrence of positive responses to landscapes which are alien to our own local environments (perhaps he would say we react against our own landscapes, thus being directed by them still?) and, more importantly, the specific notion of what is aesthetic about an appreciative response. Form takes a secondary role in Newby's account of landscape meaning, an account which does not consider the power of the sensuous surface itself to please.

Still more puzzling is the failure of this theory to confront the possibility of *learning* to perceive beyond culturally-engendered patterns. If I spend a year in Greenland, it is likely that my aesthetic appreciation of snow will be enhanced by the time I return to Scotland. In other words, exposure to different ways of seeing enlarges and influences our culturally-based assumptions. Learning how Eskimos see a variety of meteorological events where we simply see snow will change the way I perceive snow, not because I can now cite the Eskimo practice when justifying my judgement about a beautiful snowfall but because, having had the different snows and words



pointed out to me, I now experience the snow differently. The 'pointing out' is crucial to grasping the significance of non-perceptual or conceptual factors in aesthetic judgement. the Eskimo practice is relevant to my judgement only if it manifests itself in the sensuous surface of the object or place at hand (recall the singularity of aesthetic judgement in both Kant and Schopenhauer). Were you to tell me that the Eskimo people see snow as a sign of God's moral approval, I might find this interesting culturally but it has no bearing on the perceptual quality of the snow. Nor can this information be invoked as a *reason for* finding the snow beautiful. Still, conceptual or non-perceptual factors that do manifest themselves in the sensuous surface of an object expand our way of seeing.

Therefore, theories that privilege cultural patterns in the development of taste fail to acknowledge the flexibility of perception: if exposure to other cultures or perceptual practices broadens one's frame of reference - if in fact one not only acquires an expanded vocabulary but prior to this learns to perceive things differently - then culture-specific accounts of aesthetic appreciation tell us little more than what we start out appreciating, rather than what appreciation is limited to in practice. Increasing acquaintance with other civilizations through history, travel and the broadcast media provides opportunities to ponder and absorb the conceptual patterns of diverse cultures, and enlarges the frame of perceptual reference within which individuals can appreciate the natural environment.

However, conceptual and non-perceptual factors play a limited role in the general practice of aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment. Ultimately, judgements about the beauty of nature must reflect an appreciation of the sensuous surface for its own sake. Cognitive considerations enter into this appreciation only as pedagogical tools or as aids in enhancing perception. For example, I might use the knowledge that I gained in Greenland like this, saying to you: 'See the snow being driven by the wind; observe the difference between this snow, called X, and the feathery straight-falling snow we saw yesterday, called Y. The words for these different types of snow come from the language of the Eskimo people, who understand the texture of snow better than we do'. This use of cognitive considerations differs from saying something like this: 'The Eskimo people see this kind of snow as a sign of God's moral approval and because of this we find it beautiful'. In the appreciation of art, cognitive considerations may be drawn on to place an object in an historical or theoretical tradition. On the one hand, the reference might not be a uniquely aesthetic reference (the fact that the artist created this work for her daughter) but on the other hand, such information can, at times, be reflected in the sensuous or intelligible surface of the object (the artist created this work for her daughter and her daughter was a schoolteacher: notice the books in the corner next to the chalkboard). When, in art, non-perceptual factors 'show up' in the sensuous or intelligible surface of an object, the properties of the object are

ideo-sensory: they embody meanings and have the power to communicate as well as please in appearance. Some times they please in the unique *manner* of the communication. The natural environment, lacking the intentionality or conceptual context of art, harnesses cognitive considerations in a less direct manner.

Nevertheless, in the natural environment all physical elements may be included as relevant to appreciation, while with the appreciation of art it could be argued that cracks in the marble of a piece of sculpture are not always relevant to the judgement of a work *as a work*. We might like the marble with the cracks but this would be judging the sculpture as an aesthetic object broadly rather than as an intentional work fashioned by human hands. The judgement of the physical aesthetic object includes everything that appears, cracks and all. The reason for discounting the cracks is an art-historical or art-critical reason rather than a strictly aesthetic one. For example, if I am teaching an art class and using a piece of sculpture as a teaching tool, I shall not call attention to the cracks unless I know for certain that they were an intended and not an accidental part of the work. However, if I am teaching a class on aesthetics I might include the cracks as an indication of nature's presence that enhances the beauty of the original work. And, with reference to nature, I would encourage students to direct their attention to any and indeed as many components as possible of the scene at hand.

(ii)

Attention to physical features is always appropriate to judgements about the natural environment but the use of cognitive considerations is limited to what manifests itself in these features. In judgements about works of art made by human hands for human perception cognitive considerations are sometimes represented in and by the features of the work and thus judgements about art are sometimes less determined by aspects of the sensuous surface than by the relation between that surface and the cultural concepts it expresses. The key to harnessing cognitive considerations for use in the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment, without compromising the character of the judgement itself, is to limit such considerations to the sensuous surface of the object or place at hand. The interdependent position on the aesthetics of nature allows cognitive considerations too much influence, especially in permitting non-perceptual factors to be relevant reasons for making certain judgments about natural beauty, where judgements are something more than vague, dreamlike appreciation). Yet, the perceptual position, or that of the strict formalist, displays a weakness in overlooking the possibility of focusing more carefully on aspects of the sensuous surface after learning something else - something non-perceptual - about it. We can have a purely sensuous appreciation of an object or place without knowing much about it but various facts about the object or place can lead us to a sharper perception of the sensuous

surface rather than away from it. Again, the criterion for the relevance of such facts or cognitive considerations is whether or not they modify our perception of the sensuous surface of the object.<sup>15</sup>

In this sense the position of Yuriko Saito falls midway between the interdependent and perceptual positions: she allows the relevance of cognitive considerations to appreciation but limits their influence by checking them against their manifestation in the sensuous surface of the natural object or place. I would go one step further and emphasise that non-perceptual factors are not legitimate resources for *justifying* judgements. This view of mine is, I think, implicit in Saito's position, since she limits the influence of cognitive considerations very specifically, but she does not do enough in her work to distinguish the pedagogical function of these considerations from their presence (or lack thereof) in judgements about beauty. To illustrate the difference between using non-perceptual factors pedagogically and using them as justifications, I offer the following example.

If I find this tree beautiful after learning that it alone among a wood survived a terrible tornado, my judgement must be based on the effects of the sensuous properties of the tree, which, in wearing signs of the struggle, is seen to be aesthetically pleasing. My knowledge of the struggle might endear the tree to me but if there are no signs of the struggle in the surface then I cannot legitimately cite the struggle as a reason for finding the tree beautiful. My judgement of the tree's *aesthetic* value must be based not on the idea of its survival but on the *legacy* of its struggle to survive. In addition, that legacy must be pleasing in relation to the tree as a whole or at least in relation to some other environmental context. Should the signs of struggle render the tree unsightly or unremarkable, my learning the source of those signs does not automatically require that I now find the tree beautiful. Non-perceptual information may or may not influence the way we perceive an object. The purpose of calling on such information in the first place is not to determine the content of aesthetic judgements but rather to emphasise the presence of certain perceptual features, which may or may not contribute in a pleasing manner to the overall character of the object.

This example has its roots in Saito's position and her account of nature's beauty is one of the best available, despite its being available only in an unpublished dissertation. She gives many examples of the ways in which non-perceptual factors enter into our perceptions of the natural environment; one of these draws on the influence of science on perception. Cumulus clouds can be appreciated for their formal beauty at hand but learning about their genesis - a violent motion of air which determines the visible form - enhances one's perceptions of the clouds by introducing the element of motion into our observations. We may begin to appreciate the beauty of such clouds in virtue of their sweeping by us, or notice their sensuous contours more energetically now that their

causes have been understood. Recall Schopenhauer's rather dry explanation of clouds! Physical features are often perceptible traces of nature at work. Learning to recognise these traces through increased scientific awareness might also increase the possibility of apprehending more detailed or numerous aesthetic features of an object.

Yuriko Saito, in demonstrating how non-perceptual factors can be influential in our perception of the natural environment, solves the problem posed by the vast array of possible contexts for appreciating nature. Cultural pluralism, scientific knowledge and personal observation may all be used to enhance and interpret the cognitive contexts within which perceptions are made, teaching us to adopt different ways of seeing without obscuring what is uniquely aesthetic about any particular object or place. Like Warnock and Sparshott, I emphasise that that which is specifically aesthetic about a thing is given, however loosely, in appearance through sense perception: judgements must ultimately be linked directly to the sensuous or intelligible surface in appearance. However, many roads lead to a greater apprehension *of* the sensuous surface and if cognitive considerations enhance what can be observed in the first place, then aesthetic inquiry should embrace and develop them at every possible point of juncture.

## II. APPRECIATIVE PERCEPTION 1: ORIGINS

### 1. The Problem of Nature's "Naturalness"

#### (i)

Mistakes concerning the artificiality or the naturalness of objects are rare: a simple touch will unmask the plastic plant in the pub; close underwater observation will reveal the rock formation to be a carefully constructed breakwater. Cases like Dewey's finely-wrought object, where the origin of a thing is genuinely unknown, are largely hypothetical, for we often and wisely rely on context to provide clues about what it is that we are perceiving. However, misapprehensions with regard to the natural environment, while rare, are not inconceivable in a world of technological sophistication. It is possible, for example, to imagine a wholly synthetic environment, cleverly constructed in every detail including the olfactory and tactile dimensions - let's say a pavilion known as 'rainforest world' at one of the ever-expanding Walt Disney complexes. Were I to wake up there without knowing how I came to arrive (my friends have played a cruel joke, putting sleeping powder in my wine last evening), it is plausible that I might assume myself to have been kidnapped and dropped in a densely lush part of the world.



It is also plausible that, once my initial fears have subsided, I might find this place quite pleasing aesthetically. Were I to discover a few hours later, by reaching the point where 'rainforest world' turns into a brightly lit concession stand, that my assumptions were in fact incorrect and that the first was an entirely artificial construct, would my discovery necessarily entail disappointment or disillusionment? Putting aside the idea that I might be peeved at my friends (they are all waiting at the concession), I want to ask whether or not the assumed 'naturalness' of the place I admired was a constituent though non-perceptual factor in my appreciation.

In one frame of mind I might admire the precision of the imitation, the technical sophistication with which the scene's creators have fooled me. Alternatively, perhaps I am not particularly concerned with the skill or degree of accuracy displayed: I am still struck with the beauty of the place no matter what its genesis. Or, I might feel a certain distaste for the project, allowing that it is accurate and perceptually indistinguishable from a real forest but nevertheless feeling 'disappointed' that it is not 'natural'. In the latter instance I might also think that such imitations of nature are unnecessary or even unethical. Whatever my response, we can be certain that the new cognitive consideration - the place I admire is not natural by artificial - will change the *conceptual framework* within which I consider the forest. The problem for aesthetic theory is whether or not this *particular* cognitive shift between nature and art has some special or paradigmatic significance for appreciation. I shall take up the possibility of an *ethical* objection to such situations (extreme imitations of nature) in the following chapter but first I shall confront the objection that confusing art and nature entails shifts in *aesthetic* responses.

(ii)

The origin of an object or place is in some sense the ultimate non-perceptual factor in construing a cognitive framework for appreciation and judgement: non-aesthetic assessment of constructed entities will involve considerations of design and execution, while assessment of the natural environment might include dwelling on the ecology or natural history of the spot at hand. Art and artificial objects are made; nature is not (at least not in the sense of being made by human powers, which I assume here). Nature is a different *kind* of thing than any object made by human hands and thus it occupies a different conceptual context when considered *as such*. Yet, it is neither clear that this conceptual context is necessary for a valid aesthetic judgement about the natural environment nor is it certain that the aesthetic power of nature depends upon the idea of its being genuinely 'natural' in order to be effective. It is possible that what differentiates nature from art or artifice *in practice* is not an idea about the ultimate origin of either one but the markedly different perceptual features or properties inherent in them *most of the time*. The multi-sensuousness of the natural environment and its growth, decay and change through time mark

it off quite clearly from most art forms. The constructed environment is more problematic, being both environmentally multi-sensuous and partaking of the natural environment as well as the artificial. Still, skyscrapers do not grow while trees do, plates of glass do not fall seasonally like leaves. We don't mistake the texture of tree bark for a poster. There are perceptual differences between the natural and the constructed environment, differences which we recognise and which have more relevance to *aesthetic* assessment than ideas about origin.

Nevertheless, notions of origin hold great sway both in aesthetic theory and in our daily lives: it would be odd for me to walk through the woods with little or no cognizance that it was indeed a wood, and not my city neighbourhood, that I was exploring. Critically, opinion tends to favour one way of thinking about origins or another, either that of extending human activity metaphorically to all processes natural or artificial, or that of sectioning off the appreciation of nature from the appreciation of art or artifice (*both* methods, I argue in Chapter 9, deny the *continuum* between art and nature in aesthetics).

The idea of *making*, claims Paul Valéry, 'is the first and most human of ideas. "To explain" anything is never anything more than to describe a way of *making* : it is merely to remake in thought.'<sup>16</sup> Valéry admits that we cannot always tell by simple examination whether an object has been made by a person (though one might argue that *context* often gives very reliable clues!) but he also claims that the concept of *making* is so fundamental to the way human beings view the world that we extend it, actually or figuratively, to the rest of the world and its inhabitants. Yes, we undertake works on the basis of freedom while the 'making of the shell is lived, not calculated: nothing could be more contrary to our organized action preceded by an aim and operating as a cause.'<sup>17</sup> However, when encountering an object of dubious origin we do, thinks Valéry, ask "Who made this?". Explanation itself, even when applied to non-made (or lived, as Valéry says) objects, is just a way of translating the non-made into the made, for language being itself a process of making, making is the only language that we can understand.

For Valéry, we engage in making even when we offer an explanation about the non-human world. Without denying the absence of freedom that characterises the natural as opposed to the human world, we absorb the natural into the human by considering it at all, for the act of consideration is an act of making. Everything in this way becomes a part of art or artifice and the idea of *making* is extended metaphorically over the whole world. Never mind the fact that such an attitude is perhaps inherent in expansionist and exploitative attitudes towards the natural environment ("speaking" our own language without bothering to learn the special, non-intentional processes of nature); many writers on aesthetics subscribe to such a theory when they apply the principles of art in assessing the beauty of nature, or assimilate nature into art through theory.

On the other hand there are thinkers who discriminate between nature and art completely not only by admitting that nature is a different kind of thing in perception but by erecting conceptual boundaries that influence the way we appreciate the objects. 'Origin,' claims Rob Elliot in his essay 'Faking Nature', 'is important as an integral part of the evaluation process. It is important because our beliefs about it determine the valuations we make'.<sup>18</sup> It is not clear to me *how* conceptual considerations about origin will have causal influence on our aesthetic response: as in the example of 'rainforest world', we must ask whether or not our initial appreciation was really aesthetic or whether it was mingled with assumptions that made its being natural a part of that pleasure.

Put concisely, is the correct belief in nature's 'naturalness' somehow a *necessary* factor in making judgements about its beauty? Is 'naturalness' a non-perceptual factor that must and should determine the way aesthetic judgements are made? Kant thinks it is and so does Elliot.

The appeal that many find in areas of wilderness in natural forests and wild rivers depends very much on the naturalness of such places. There may be similarities between the experience one has when confronted with the multifaceted complexity, the magnitude, the awesomeness of a very large city, and the experience of walking through a rainforest...Despite the similarity there are also differences. We value the forest and the river in part because they are representative of the world outside our dominion, because their existence is independent of us.<sup>19</sup>

I do not disagree with Elliot's main point, which I believe reflects the opinion of many of us: we do *value* nature in part for its naturalness, for its existence beyond our dominion. Yet, one can value nature in several ways -scientific, historical, cultural, *aesthetic* - and its appeal can be composed of several different sorts of appreciation. The problem with the above view is that Elliot, like many others writing on the topic of nature's beauty, thinks that the *concept* of nature's 'naturalness' has something to do with its specifically *aesthetic* appeal.

I want to argue that this 'naturalness' is a legitimate factor in judgement when it is *perceived* as such. When we see the tree growing, changing, shedding and unfurling leaves through time, we witness its natural character perceptually and the features which reflect these changes can be factors in our judgement of its beauty. Of course, trees manifest more signs of non-human genesis than, say, rocks. Rocks might be easier to construct and camouflage since they do not 'grow'; the naturalness of the rock is not as easily perceived (though you might in fact taste it to find out!) as it is in a tree. In the case of a rock formation, when we cannot tell for certain by examining it whether or not it is natural, what *aesthetic* bearing does the awareness of origin possess? How can we *justify* an aesthetic judgement based on non-perceptual factors - something like, 'I find this rock

beautiful because it is typical of stone in this area and it has been around for 30,000 years', as opposed to 'I find this rock beautiful in virtue of its fine traces of quartz setting off the limestone' - even a factor so decisive as origin?

## 2. Precedents for Shifts Based on Knowledge

### (i)

Elliot of course is not the first person to claim a link between awareness of origin and the category of appreciation. Hegel completely ignores nature in his aesthetics for precisely the same reasons Elliot invokes to support nature: its freedom from our creative dominion. A more contemporary thinker, Monroe Beardsley, defies his own prohibition against generic interest by systematically discriminating against natural objects in his writing. Despite his attacks on the Intentional Fallacy at work in criticism, Beardsley himself violates it by favouring artworks on the basis of their human origin.<sup>20</sup> Since most contemporary work in aesthetics features art rather than nature as an object of appreciation, we can assume that critics generally tend to make the same distinction as Beardsley.

Kant claims moral superiority on behalf of those who appreciate nature more immediately than art but we know that Kant's reasons for making such a claim are not based on the aesthetic appeal of nature. His birdsong example of a shift in appreciative perception, where the deceived guests feel disappointed after the revelation of their host's trick, demonstrates Kant's awareness of the effect of cognitive shifts on aesthetic assessment generally: we are not after all hearing birds but instead a very skilful birdcaller. The shift in cognitive context leads us to ask ourselves what it was that we were enjoying. Was it the timbre of the sounds themselves? Was it the idea of the birds singing in their habitat? Perhaps we did enjoy the birdsong only insofar as we heard it in its natural context - we enjoyed it *as* birdsong. Once the song is unveiled as an imitation, we must adjust our conceptual framework for hearing the sounds. If we feel disappointed after the shift, it might be because our original pleasure was not strictly a result of the beauty of the sounds but also mixed up with ideas about appreciating nature.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mary Mothersill provides a good counter-example to Kant's (a supposedly skilled birdcaller is miming to the sounds of a real bird) in order to underscore the difference between appreciating something in an aesthetic manner and appreciating something as a part of a specific context that is itself imperceptible. In both examples, the element of *deceit* may be a key to the disillusionment following the revelations (neither Kant nor Mothersill mention this). However, Mothersill is, I think, successful in her claim that



disappointment need not necessarily follow on the heels of a shift in appreciative perception. At Kant's country manor I might continue to enjoy the sounds of skilful birdcalls against the country-quiet night. At Mothersill's birdcall recital I might nevertheless be captivated by the beauty of the bird's singing. Kant claims that faked birdsong disappoints or at least destroys the immediate interest we took, though he does say that immediate interest can be replaced by mediate interest (decorating one's room and the like) - in both cases, of course, he defies his own prohibition against judging what an object is to be, in aesthetic appreciation. However, Kant's explanations are rooted in moral and epistemological theories. While they are of a piece with the views of Elliot, who views the "naturalness" of nature as crucial in appreciation (though for reasons that differ from those of Kant), they introduce, but do not bring us any closer to an understanding of, how shifts in appreciative perception might influence aesthetic responsiveness *in aesthetic terms*.

(ii)

Schopenhauer, in the example of the pumice stone building, indicates that he too is aware of shifts in cognitive context, though I disagree with his claims about these shifts. Even though his example is from the artificial world, it is still an enlightening one with regard to the role of shifts in appreciation.

As cited earlier, Schopenhauer imagines a building that no longer pleases us once we learn that it is made either of pumice stone, or of a patchwork of highly different building materials (for the sake of simplicity I'll stick to the pumice stone here). Like Dewey, Schopenhauer believes that the difference made by a shift in appreciative perception is not just one of intellectual classification. No one, not even Mothersill, would argue that attitudes towards objects do not change with the advent of new information but in Schopenhauer's example the shift, we can assume, would not only be a cognitive but, at some point, a perceptual one: I can go up to the building and touch it, perceive its lightness sensuously. Perhaps my judgement would alter, negatively, because of this. Upon perceiving the building more clearly I can *tell* that it is pumice stone and I must judge it according to my perception. For emphasis, however, let's imagine two alternative versions of Schopenhauer's example.

If I am seeing the building from a distance and am enjoying its posture among other buildings as well as its elegance and stature, and am then told it is constructed entirely of pumice stone, will I cease to enjoy the building as I did? On the one hand I might concede that the idea of pumice stone seems inappropriate to a building but from my particular viewpoint it looks stunning and the idea of its material, however odd, doesn't interfere with my appreciation of the building at a distance (I'm assuming that pumice stone buildings aren't dangerous).

On the other hand I might proceed to the site of the building and, rather than finding the pumice stone material distasteful, I actually enjoy the contrast between the illusion of heaviness and the lightness of the stone; perhaps I like the texture and colour of the building too, its immediate presence. Then, going back to my vantage point, I not only enjoy the building in its distant context but I am acquainted with it in detail as well, and enjoy it still. In both cases, the cognizance of the building's being made of pumice stone does not interfere with the perception of beauty. In the first instance it is not a relevant consideration and in the second it actually becomes a factor in appreciation.

Schopenhauer is short-sighted in linking the ordinary connotations of pumice stone (a friend to feet) with their undermining the *aesthetic* strength of a building. I see no reason why one should be able to say *a priori* that shifts of this kind - shifts that involve awareness of nonconventional factors - necessarily lead to aesthetic disillusionment. In fact, art often breaks through the connotations of the ordinary to yield new and exciting ways of seeing and appreciating. Schopenhauer's pumice stone sham may be Christo's next work of genius.

So, while the introduction of knowledge about a material aspect of a work of art cannot guarantee or induce a shift in *aesthetic* response (though it may shift the context dramatically), it might effect an aesthetic shift if the knowledge is perceived as sensuously relevant (or intelligibly relevant in the case of literary art). This conclusion ties in with my discussion of relevance in the previous section: knowledge is relevant only insofar as it alters the perception of the aesthetic surface of an object, that being the surface as made up by its discernible properties. If Schopenhauer is at a distance from his building, the alteration can only be imagined and not perceived. Similarly, with reference to knowledge about the natural environment, we can say that knowledge is relevant - *even* the knowledge of origins - only if it manifests itself in the sensuous surface of the object or place appreciated. If aesthetic features are altered by a shift in appreciative perception (i.e., if we perceive new features or old ones fall out of focus), then a corresponding shift in aesthetic response may be appropriate, but is not necessarily so: it depends on each individual object, its features and its context.

Thus far, it is not clear how ideas of nature's "naturalness" themselves, without evidence in perception, can alter aesthetic features (think back to the example of cleverly designed rocks). In the next chapter I shall take up the challenge posed by examples constructed to support the claim that nature's "naturalness" is aesthetically, and ethically, relevant - even when it is in no way perceived in the sensuous surface of the environment.

## NOTES - CHAPTER FIVE

- 1 Edmund Penning-Rowsell, 'Research Agenda' in Penning-Rowsell and David Lowenthal, (eds.), *Landscape: Meanings and Values* (Allen and Unwin 1986), p. 117.
- 2 Mary Carman Rose, 'Nature as Aesthetic Object: An Essay in Meta-Aesthetics' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 16(1): 3 - 13, 1976.
- 3 Allen Carlson, 'Environmental Aesthetics in Interdisciplinary Perspective' in Carlson and Barry Sadler, (eds.), *Environmental Aesthetics: Essays in Interpretation* (Department of Geography, University of Victoria, 1982), p. 5.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 L. Duane Willard, 'On Preserving Nature's Aesthetic Features' *Environmental Ethics* 2(4): 293-311, Winter 1980, p. 296.
- 6 John Punter, 'Landscape Aesthetics' in John Gold and Jacqueline Burgess (eds.), *Valued Environments* (George Allen and Unwin, 1982), p. 113.
- 7 Yuriko Saito, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Western and Japanese Perspectives and Their Ethical Implications*, a dissertation submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the Department of Philosophy at Boston College, 1983, p. 244 (unpublished).
- 8 F.E. Sparshott, 'Figuring the Ground: Notes on Some Theoretical Problems of the Aesthetic Environment' *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 6: 11-23, 1972, p. 19.
- 9 Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 47.
- 10 I am indebted to Prof. Ronald Hepburn for bringing this distinction to my attention.
- 11 It is good to remember here that appreciating a flower aesthetically need not involve measuring the perfection of its flower-like attributes against some steady concept of a flower. Kant is correct in distinguishing between the experience of beauty and the comparative analysis of form. To find a thing beautiful does not necessarily require knowledge about the kind of thing it is; one need not have a conceptual box in which to place it, an end. Nor is there need to invoke a concept of the object's perfection or ideal. Schopenhauer, too, is clear on this and I accept his and Kant's views: aesthetic merit does not collapse into functional or formal perfection.
- 12 Thomas Saarinen, 'Environmental Perception' in *Perspectives on Environment* Ian R. Manners and Marvin Mikesell (eds.) (The Association of American Geographers, 1974), p. 253.
- 13 P.T Newby, 'Understanding Landscape Quality' *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 18(4): 345-56, Autumn 1978, p. 347.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Saito, 'Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', p. 24.

- 16 Paul Valéry, 'Man and the Sea Shell' in *Aesthetics* trans. Ralph Manheim (Bollingen Foundation, 1964), p. 12.
- 17 Ibid., p. 23.
- 18 Rob Elliot, 'Faking Nature' *Inquiry* 25: 81-93, 1982, p. 92.
- 19 Ibid., p. 86.
- 20 For a good discussion of this see Michael Hancher, 'Poems vs. Trees: The Aesthetics of Monroe Beardsley' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31(2): 181-191, Winter 1972.



## CHAPTER SIX

### ETHICAL AND OTHER CONSTRAINTS ON AESTHETIC APPRECIATION

#### I. APPRECIATIVE PERCEPTION 2 : ORIGINS AND ETHICS

##### 1. Carlson's Coastline: Presentation

(i)

Among the small but growing number of contemporary philosophers who give critical attention to the aesthetics of the natural environment, Allen Carlson has been the most vocal and prolific. His own articles on the subject have both inspired other writers to take up his approach<sup>1</sup> and headlined interdisciplinary collections on the aesthetics of nature.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally he ignites critical debate. Yuriko Saito has objected to Carlson's approach to the topic of nature's beauty in her dissertation and more recently in her paper 'Is There A Correct Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature?'<sup>3</sup>

Here, I would like to isolate one of Carlson's examples for the purpose of exhibiting, and arguing against, the viewpoint that nature's 'naturalness' is a determining factor in our aesthetic judgement of it, even when the 'naturalness' is unperceived.

The example I shall be referring to is given in full in Carlson's paper 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgement and Objectivity'<sup>4</sup> but before turning directly to the example I wish to quote Carlson from a later paper, since the quotes make clear the governing ideas behind Carlson's claims.

My view is that the aesthetic qualities an object has are only those it appears to have when it is appropriately appreciated and moreover that such appreciation must involve appreciation of that object as the kind of thing it is. Consequently, if two different objects are different kinds of things, they can have very different aesthetic qualities even if they are identical in appearance.<sup>5</sup>

If an object's aesthetic qualities are those given in appropriate appreciation and appropriate appreciation involves appreciation of the kind of object it is, then there is a simple way to alter the aesthetic qualities of any object. This is by changing the kind of object it is.<sup>6</sup>

According to this position, a found object that we assume to be a primitive artwork will have one set of aesthetic qualities while the *same* found object, discovered to be natural, will have another. For Carlson, appropriate aesthetic appreciation is governed by origins and origins in turn yield the

aesthetic qualities that we perceive.

Immediately there are three problems with this view. One, objects or places which are of dubious origin can have *no* aesthetic qualities at all if perceiving aesthetic qualities is tied necessarily to the recognition of the kind of thing something is. Two, Carlson is very vague about what he means by the term 'aesthetic quality'. I see qualities as sort of aesthetic character words, like 'graceful', 'balanced' or 'morbid'. Some quality words function primarily as aesthetic words (graceful) while others have more pragmatic uses as well (morbid). In both cases such qualities depend on the perceptual features of the object, what I would call the aesthetic properties of a thing, its colours, shape, texture, etc. I call such features 'aesthetic properties' because they function as integral parts of a thing's beauty, and are seen to be interacting or at least functioning in some manner important to a thing's aesthetic character. I might call a painting of deep purples and neon greens 'lurid' - the colour patches are the aesthetic properties which give rise to the quality of the painting's being 'lurid'. Carlson seems to make a distinction between physical features and the way we describe a thing but he is not at all precise about what he means by 'quality'.

Three, even if his use of the word 'quality' is loose, Carlson is nevertheless completely redefining what most people would think of as aesthetic qualities by subsuming perceptual features under considerations of *genesis*. If I find a small wooden object but am unsure of its origin, it seems the one thing I *can* be sure of are its aesthetic properties and qualities: its colours, textures and shapes and the discernible effect of these in combination (since its origin is dubious, considerations about the *process* that produced the object can't be tied very tightly to its specific aesthetic effect). When asking about a thing's beauty or aesthetic worth we might say, 'What physical features are aesthetically prominent in this object? What qualities do these properties and relations manifest *here*, in my perception of them?' An answer might be that a rock formation is monumental or frenetic or gentle in virtue of its properties, which one then points out. Carlson does away with this conception of aesthetic properties and qualities by insisting that we adopt an appreciation which acknowledges origin (and, therefore, considerations of design or evolution). In order to prove that his method of appropriate appreciation is aesthetically correct, Carlson tries to demonstrate that we perceive different qualities under different categories of description.

I think that what Carlson could, but doesn't, say, is that two identical things can have different *relevant* features if we are to appreciate them as manifestations of some originating force. A large crack through an ancient stone is always aesthetically relevant but an identical crack through a piece of abstract sculpture might not be relevant if it appeared after the work was executed and we were judging the work as an executed art object. However, there is nothing to prevent me

appreciating the sculpture *with* the crack; perhaps it is more interesting because of it. This, in essence, is my critical point: a crack in the sculpture might not be relevant to considerations of the work as a work, but it may indeed make the *object* more interesting aesthetically. Some people think Billie Holiday recordings sound better with the scratches and technical defects of a bygone era. Once again, the *aesthetic* is a consideration of its own both within and beyond the parameters of art. But, let us proceed to Carlson's coastline before adumbrating the aesthetic more fully.

(ii)

In 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgement and Objectivity' Carlson asks that we imagine two coastlines, one natural (N) and one of human design (M). The coastlines, in perception, are indistinguishable. On one level, says Carlson, aesthetic appreciation would be the same for both, involving awareness of colours, contours and sensuous patterns. However, Carlson insists that, at another level, the aesthetic qualities appreciated would be different for the two identical objects. This new level grows out of the way we describe the patterns of genesis for each coastline.

For example, pattern M can be described as indicating careful design, as an exact copy of the pattern N, or as the product of man's ingenuity; while the pattern N can be described as typical of, say, North American Pacific coastlines, as indicating a high tide coastal formation, or as the product of the erosion of the sea.<sup>7</sup>

Despite having *apparently* identical aesthetic qualities - those yielded in perception - the *real* aesthetic qualities, for Carlson, are those that fall under certain descriptions of genesis. So, M might have the quality of being cleverly designed while N might show definite signs of soil erosion. For Carlson, perceptual features are contemplated in light of their origins and entail 'the appreciation of them as something in virtue of which such descriptions are true'.<sup>8</sup> I agree that we can describe two objects as having different patterns of genesis, when we know about such patterns in fact - but it is not clear how such descriptions alter the *aesthetic quality* of the objects under description. Can't N and M be clever and eroded, respectively, and yet share the aesthetic quality of being dramatic?

For Carlson, the application of qualities is origin-specific and strictly non-perceptual, so perhaps the dramatic configuration of M would have to be further differentiated from the identical one of N by the addition of factual, non-perceptual information. And, appreciating an artificial coastline as if it were natural, or as if such categories didn't matter, involves what Carlson would call errors of aesthetic relevance. Disregarding origin, he claims, is tenuous because our pleasure might be destroyed when we learn that the coastline is not real, and it is misleading because it

directs our contemplation away from reality. I would suggest that the *aesthetic* 'reality' has more to do with the qualities which appear to us in the object than with the object's factual origin. However, Carlson focuses on the disregard of factual background and calls the consequences of disregard 'aesthetic omissions' and 'aesthetic deceptions'. He uses omissions and deceptions to demonstrate the correctness of his category-relative aesthetics.

Aesthetic omissions occur when, having contemplated an object under the wrong category, we leave out valuable and relevant attributes of the thing as it really is. Obviously these attributes are not limited to perceptual features since both of Carlson's coastlines are identical and yet have different aesthetic qualities - which, we assume, grow out of their attributes. Aesthetic deception results when our appreciation of a thing is based upon false assumptions about its genesis and history (remember that one might have enjoyed rainforest world only insofar as it was ontologically, rather than phenomenologically, 'natural'). A curvature of stone that frames a dramatic tidal pool will in one category be 'described' as the result of natural forces and in another be understood through concepts of design and construction. To choose the wrong category for appreciation will result in omissions of important attributes and deception about what it is you're observing. Because, for Carlson, the correct category in fact determines the appropriate aesthetic qualities assigned, N and M will have very different qualities despite having identical features in perception, and these qualities will be 'lost' in omission and deception.

## 2. Carlson's Coastline: Problems

### (i)

Several critical points can be raised against Carlson's claims. For the sake of clarity I shall separate them by number.

(1) As mentioned earlier, Carlson differentiates between perceptual features and aesthetic qualities, but is unclear about what these aesthetic qualities might be when they are not rooted in the sensuous surface. Furthermore, Carlson's determination of aesthetic relevance by categorical fact seems to me unwarranted. A crack in a piece of abstract sculpture is not relevant if we are judging the object as a work of skill *but* it is possible to appreciate the sculpture - especially an abstract sculpture - as a beautiful object, without distinct category, *and* it is possible to do so by concentrating on the sensuous surface and its properties which function aesthetically.



It is the sensuous surface of a coastline that yields the patterns that we find aesthetically pleasing. Understanding those patterns as emanating from certain causes (descriptions) is not a bad thing, and it might well afford a pleasure of the understanding, but recognising causal relationships is not aesthetically necessary. Carlson's two coastlines share identical patterns, identical sensuous surfaces, but his definition of aesthetic relevance subordinates what we take to be the aesthetic - the appearance of beauty - to descriptions of genesis. This strikes me as counterintuitive: our engagement with the description of origins is intellectual rather than aesthetic. Learning botany through the examination of a single flower is not the same sort of thing as appreciating its appearance for its own sake. Knowledge of origins and unobserved processes is relevant only insofar as it enhances our perception of patterns. Surely if appreciation is aesthetic it is the patterns that catch our attention most vividly. It is difficult to imagine a person, perched on a cliff high above a magnificent coastline, fretting over what categories to apply for proper appreciation of the evidently stunning perceptual features. Carlson employs an idiosyncratic notion of the aesthetic and, rather than seeking to *enlarge* aesthetic understanding through the addition of scientific knowledge, Carlson tries to *define* the aesthetic in terms of science.

(ii)

(2) Carlson admits that mere perception does not yield the information about genesis that is necessary to his theory. In his aesthetic universe the 'experts' would be naturalists and other scientists who 'knew', by means other than ordinary perception, what the correct categories for aesthetic appreciation were. Carlson tries to devise a context for nature's beauty that is parallel to the historical/critical context for art. In doing this he assumes (after Kendall Walton) that what is aesthetic about art is determined by its relevant historical and critical categories. This is a mistake for two reasons.

One, Carlson is never explicit in his prescriptions to the scientific experts: *how* the categories of science are supposed to provide aesthetic standards or guides for judgement remains at all times vague (I develop this point in Chapter 9). The relevance of scientific categories to aesthetic appreciation has been questioned elsewhere by Neil Evernden<sup>9</sup> but it is worth noting here that even in his most recent writings Carlson fails to articulate the nature of the relationship between scientific understanding and aesthetic appreciation.<sup>10</sup>

Two, aside from the historical and critical contexts of art, art differs from nature in being possessed of identifiably ideo-sensory properties. Such properties are sometimes less sensuous and more intelligible than those of nature - one would seldom after very early childhood mistake a word for a bug, or the aesthetic merit of a poem to be pleasing because of its layout rather than its

intelligible meaning - and thus art can 'harness' the web of human meaning in a direct and communicative way, a way unavailable to nature. So, even if the art/historical contexts of art do not give it its unique aesthetic character by creating non-perceptual/conceptual categories, art can nevertheless communicate clearly by virtue of its aesthetic properties. A rough hourglass indentation in a tree is a sure sign that a beaver has been and gone - an *indication* of the beaver's previous presence. But, the words 'Kinnock in 92' carved into a tree do more than indicate - they *communicate* - and thus the non-perceptual meanings behind some properties of some artworks are more directly relevant to art because they are part of a signifying relation, a relation conveyed aesthetically.

In both cases - the beaver and Neil Kinnock - *knowing* the cause of the marks doesn't make a judgement of beauty or aesthetic merit correct or incorrect. The fact that Margaret Thatcher carved the slogan is an art-historical fact without necessarily being relevant to either the appearance, the meaning or the originality of the slogan's presence. Similarly, knowing that the beaver gnawed the hourglass into the tree is a natural fact, but it does little more than direct our attention more carefully to the tree, perhaps to tooth marks that enhance the overall appearance of the tree. However, the fact that Mrs. Thatcher carved the slogan might be aesthetically relevant as a *performance*, if she made it clear that it was she who carved it and also did so in a manner which suggested the carving was a political-performative act. So, the 'Kinnock in 92' can be pleasing not only as a carving - perhaps the letters are precisely in the style of medieval prayerbooks - it can express something to us as human beings in a human way, and the character of the expression, i.e., the relation of the words, their appearance, their location, their presentation and their meaning, to the world of meaning beyond them, can itself be of an aesthetic character. So, in trying to establish for nature an authoritative context similar to that of art, Carlson misses the aesthetic point by focusing on the historical/critical aspect of art, which is not always relevant to judgements about it, rather than on the unique character of art's *properties*.

Art history and criticism are part of an institution that intersects with an area called the aesthetic and consequently not all matters of art history/criticism are matters of aesthetics, and vice-versa. Carlson assumes that the beauty of art is determined by its adherence to certain principles or its location in a specific historical context (remember the aesthetic irrelevance of Mrs. Thatcher's having carved the tree when her work is seen as a carving rather than as a performance - all non-perceptual factors must somehow be communicated in the surface of the object and, unless the 'object' is a performance, the artist isn't necessarily a relevant factor in assessment). In doing this he defines the categories of nature appreciation in analogy to the categories of art. If the categories of art are not always necessary factors in its appreciation, which I think they are not, then Carlson's analogy does not hold and the view that science determines how nature is beautiful

is false. Carlson's error is to seek objectivity of aesthetic judgement through non-perceptual considerations rather than through examination of properties in apprehension. I shall reinforce my claim in the final chapter of the thesis.

By referring to non-perceptual considerations in validating judgements, Carlson loses the sense of what we mean when we say that we appreciate something aesthetically. If three individuals are admiring three perceptually indistinguishable coastlines, the first person, a naturalist, might describe what she knows to be the patterns of the coast as indicative of certain causal processes. The second person, a landscape architect, might highlight certain features as skilful aspects of design and execution. The third person, a bright and perceptive thirteen-year-old, describes what he sees, hears, smells and touches, even tastes (if the air is salty). He does not, indeed cannot, bother about descriptions behind the patterns. Rather, he discusses the coastline and what his experience of it are like. While ecology or the principles of design may indeed bolster the descriptions of the first two observers - and their descriptions might encourage us to be more aware of certain perceptual features within the coastal pattern - the perceptually-oriented account of the adolescent would be no less aesthetic in its appreciative character. On the contrary, the account of the adolescent would be more purely aesthetic in Kant's sense were the other two descriptions to rely on origin for their appreciative assessments.

(iii)

(3) In rare cases of objects or coastlines that are of dubious origin, the origin may in fact be a conceptual consideration. However, in matters of aesthetic appreciation, the origin of the object is grounded on inference; the beauty of the item is not.<sup>11</sup> Carlson asserts that mistakes about the origin of an item found to be beautiful lead to aesthetic omissions and deceptions: a shift towards the proper category results in an entirely different set of aesthetic qualities, which are either left out of the original description or are wantonly ignored. He uses the idea of omissions and deceptions to justify his theory, to establish that disregard for the genesis of an item leads to a tenuous and inappropriate aesthetic appreciation.

However, Carlson cannot use omissions and deceptions to validate the categories of genesis because one needs the categories in the first place to determine what the omissions and deceptions are. Yuriko Saito has questioned this aspect of Carlson's argument.

In spite of its initial plausibility, Carlson's argument supposes at the outset what he is attempting to establish. That is, notions of aesthetic omissions and deceptions make sense *only after* the possibility of proper aesthetic appreciation free of these defects (i.e., relative to the

proper category) is established. The idea of the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature, however, is what Carlson must establish when he invokes the notions of the sins of aesthetic omission and deception. His alleged argument, therefore, turns out not to support his conclusion but to restate it.<sup>12</sup>

Omissions and deceptions, therefore, cannot be used to *establish* the correctness of aesthetic categories, since their character as omissions or deceptions depends on the *prior definition* of the category. However, the concepts themselves have some importance for aesthetic appreciation, though not the stature given them by Carlson.

Omissions can be important for interpretive purposes: if we do not know that this coastline is artificial we may fail to focus on, say, the neat edges of the stones near the waterfront. The pattern of the edges is pleasing in itself but perhaps knowing the genesis of the pattern may help us to bring certain features into clearer focus for others; perhaps they would not notice the aesthetic power of the striking edges unless we brought it to their attention. Once again, the function of category relevant, non-perceptual information is *pedagogical*: it can be used to bring elements of the sensuous surface to the attentions of others and, while the descriptions of genesis are not in themselves necessary or relevant to the aesthetic judgement about nature, they can nevertheless enhance our appreciation when they manifest themselves *in* perception.

(iv)

The notion of deception is an interesting point that Carlson does not develop as fully as he could. By claiming that we engage in aesthetic deception when we appreciate a pattern under an incorrect description, Carlson implies that there is an *ethical* dimension to the activity of appreciation. It is already clear, I think, that a shift from one category of description to another does not necessarily lead to disillusionment. To mistake an artificial coastline for a natural one needn't result in a decrease of pleasure once the mistake is corrected: it simply necessitates a cognitive shift in context. Yet, Carlson uses an example of a playboy model to demonstrate the unethical implications of the improper use of categories.

A playboy model, says Carlson, is a person with complex individual needs, qualities and talents. However, when viewed as a playboy model, she loses her personhood to the process of objectification which necessarily accompanies such viewing. This, Carlson claims, is unethical: it is suspect to appreciate her in an incorrect category ("sex object") since the use of that category promotes sexist attitudes. Of course, the analogy is a bad one since it is not the use of the incorrect category *per se* that is suspect but the implications of the specific category applied. In fact we appreciate individual people in categories that don't represent their actual persons all the time:



films and drama require a willingness to engage in aesthetic deception, one that has no readily apparent unethical consequences.

Carlson thinks that applying categories of art to nature, or vice-versa, is unethical because of the deception involved. While most of us would disapprove of such deception if it had direct and negative consequences for the natural environment, it is nevertheless not clear that such deception would be unethical in relation to aesthetics (though it might be inappropriate).<sup>13</sup> But, we must ask, if we have engaged in aesthetic deception followed by an awareness of our error, how should we view the situation if disillusionment occurs?

As I see it, there are at least two possibilities for considering shifts in appreciation, one of which I have examined already: if disillusionment occurs following a change in knowledge about origins, then it is quite possible that our original enjoyment was not aesthetic (perceptual) as such but was tied inextricably to the context we imagined. In this case, aesthetic features are subordinated to non-perceptual considerations and, once the non-perceptual context is clarified, the supposedly aesthetic features turn out not to be aesthetic but rather the vehicles of reverie (no bad thing in itself - just different!).

The second possibility for disillusionment is not quite so straightforward, concerning as it does the idea of ethical constraints on aesthetic appreciation. Carlson thinks that an appreciation of nature which does not acknowledge the naturalness of the object appreciated - acknowledge it in a non-perceptual, categorical way, as opposed to perceptual - is unethical, though he does not make it clear *how* or *why* such an appreciation is wrong. It is not enough, it seems to me, to claim that mistakes about origins are unethical in the aesthetic appreciation of nature. We must ask whether or not there are ethical constraints on aesthetic appreciation generally, before determining that mistakes about origin are necessarily unethical. After all, disillusionment following a shift based on origins might indicate the non-aesthetic character of my initial appreciation - but would it make sense to say that the disillusionment occurred because I felt my initial appreciation was *wrong*, in ethical terms?

Even if we were to accept Carlson's claim that correct categories determine aesthetic features of an object, we would not say that mistakes about categories were wrong, but simply mistaken. Nevertheless, the question about ethical constraints on aesthetic appreciation generally (and its concomitant questions about acknowledging the naturalness of nature) is a difficult and largely ignored one. So far, I have tried to indicate that *non-perceptual* considerations of nature's naturalness are not necessary to appreciate the specific features of a beautiful natural object (the rocks on Carlson's coastline look stunning no matter who put them there or what non-perceptual

"qualities" they possess). Now I shall ask, not only if an awareness of nature's naturalness is an *ethical* obligation in aesthetics, but also whether there are ethical constraints operating in aesthetics generally.

## II. APPRECIATIVE PERCEPTION 3: ETHICS

### 1. Associations: Emotive and Ethical

#### (i)

When referring to Kant's claim about evidence of a shift in appreciative perception which follows the unmasking of the roguish youth, Mothersill notes that the judgements of Kant's evening listeners are 'impure' because it was the idea of the nightingales' singing, rather than the actual quality of the sounds, that precipitated pleasure. Yet, Mothersill acknowledges the complexity and variations among shifts in appreciative perception, and to address these she offers two examples where shifts occur on grounds which, while being non-perceptual, are not related to origins or categories about origins.

Associations, those non-perceptual factors that sometimes influence judgement, are in evidence when a change of belief about an object has a dramatic effect on our appreciation.<sup>14</sup> Associations have, to some degree, been discussed in the previous chapter. However, Mothersill's examples are relevant here because of their ties to ethical, rather than historical, literary or scientific considerations.

In her first example of associations Mothersill presents a situation where one might find a man attractive until one discovers that he is the head of a political assassination unit. The man then "looks" unattractive - one begins to "see" him differently. Mothersill says that associations like this one - where a new, non-perceptual belief alters an object in perception - are 'a contingent truth which must simply be accepted.' (BR, p. 400)

This example is easy to empathise with because the idea of a man's heading a political assassination unit has obviously distasteful and unethical implications. I think that the precarious and subjective nature of such associations, though, can also be illustrated by an example where no ethical limitations are implied. What if the man were employed as a sewage disposal worker?

Surely there is nothing unethical about such a job (when performed in an environmentally-sound fashion!). A person might, though perhaps not admirably, find the man less attractive once this information were known. Of course, it could be argued that the job had no personal link to the man's character and that finding him unattractive because of the job is superficial. Nevertheless, it would illustrate that associative shifts in aesthetic appreciation are often *not* rational and are unpredictable and sometimes uncontrollable. So, when are such associative shifts "legitimate" on ethical grounds (as public judgements), and when are they simply reflective of personal taste or bias? Mothersill's second example pushes the issue a bit further.

Two people are enjoying a concert. Between movements one person leans over to the other and whispers, 'Did you realise that all four musicians are ex-Nazis?'. Mothersill notes that 'the receipt of such intelligence might be as dampening as a sudden attack of indigestion.' (BR, p. 291) The analogy with indigestion both highlights and omits important considerations about the place of the ethical in aesthetic appreciation. The suddenness of one's shift in appreciation - and the possibility that the music would no longer *sound* good - is like the onset of physical pain in its power to alter judgement. In this sense Mothersill's example illustrates the way in which non-perceptual factors with unethical dimensions can have a drastic effect on our appreciation.

However, two things are neglected by Mothersill here. One is the issue of whether it is a subjective association or a genuine aspect of the object/event that should be the focus of disillusionment. Second, Mothersill doesn't ask whether or not the concert-goer would have an *obligation* to stop enjoying the music, or whether, if such an obligation were incumbent upon an enlightened listener, it even makes sense to speak of an imperative against enjoyment.

(ii)

It is Mothersill's omissions with which I am most concerned, because of their relevance to questions about the place of nature's naturalness in appreciation. Some judgements will shift because of a change in origin and hence a change away from our secret source of pleasure. Some judgements will shift emotively or suddenly, due to the introduction of information which either impairs our ability to perceive peacefully or actually alters the perception itself (e.g., my getting stabbed prevents *me* from enjoying the concert any longer vs. the fact that the painting was done by numbers makes me look more sharply, resulting in the perception of subtle graphs and boundary-lines beneath the surface of the paint). In either case, we no longer see the object as we first did. And, some judgements will shift because the new information introduces an unethical component into the object's (non-perceptual) constitution. Within the scope of the latter shifts, the alteration might be emotive, or sudden; but, does it make sense to say that we have an obligation,

either to perceive differently or to stop enjoying what we do perceive, in the absence of an emotive impetus?

In other words, are there ethical limitations on what ought to be enjoyed? It does make sense to say that, in light of certain information, one would most likely be *unable* to continue enjoying something. But, can it also be said that one *ought not* to enjoy it, even if one does, after the information is passed on, continue to take pleasure in it? Would Mothersill's concert-goer be guilty of some infraction were she to continue to enjoy the concert once the identity of the musicians was known?

I realise that this problem becomes even more complicated when the art forms appreciated are legacies of deceased persons: a dead Nazi is somehow less contentious than one playing the viola before us. My suspicion is that intimations as to the personal lives of artists might dampen our enjoyment at times, though if the work were very good we might still enjoy it despite the unpalatable information. It seems rash, in light of the abundant beauty produced by wife-beaters, drug-addicts and heinous individuals, to speak of an obligation to dismiss a work because of the *artist's* personal life. However, when the individual is still living or when the nature of the work is itself destructive, the various shifts involved become more complicated both emotionally and ethically. I shall leave aside questions about the lives of artists in order to pursue in detail the ethical constraints relevant to art, events or objects within the natural environment.

Some thinkers, most notably Carlson and those who agree with him, believe that there are ethical limitations when it comes to the appreciation of natural beauty, because the earth gives home to many creatures other than human beings. On this view, ethics becomes the framework within which the aesthetics of nature operates.<sup>15</sup> Some views of nature are seen as more ethically appropriate than others 'in that they function as a better justification for preserving nature.'<sup>16</sup> Values are determined, ethical imperatives follow and aesthetic practices which violate these imperatives are not appropriate. My problem with *this* relation between ethics and aesthetics - the predication of beauty on the basis of environmental preservation - is that it fails to elucidate what is uniquely *aesthetic* about nature and, instead, *derives* aesthetic worth from ecological balance.

For Carlson and others, appropriate appreciations of nature take into account genesis and ecological understanding, since an awareness of these things leads to a more rational preservation of the environment. Supposedly such information will also yield a more sophisticated aesthetic awareness, though in light of Carlson's coastline example this is not always the case. Plus, those who insist that the aesthetics of nature is derivative of some more widespread political/ecological objective ignore the fact that the perception of beauty often *supports* or *augments* arguments for



the preservation of nature: if beauty is derived from preservation-ideals, then any support it lends to preservation is merely tautological. In fact, natural beauty seems to be one reason, among others, for supporting preservation. It can strengthen our bonds with the environment and encourage us to learn more about it. Surely it is an addition to, and not a descendent of, ethical or political objectives with regard to nature.

Needless to say, this doesn't mean that there *aren't* ethical constraints on the appreciation of objects or events within the natural environment. Once again I would like to use an example given by Allan Carlson, this time to explore the role of ethics within the aesthetics of nature. In his article 'Environmental Aesthetics and the Dilemma of Aesthetic Education' <sup>17</sup> Carlson applies a theory developed by John Hospers to matters of nature's beauty. There are, says Carlson, two senses of a thing's being aesthetically pleasing, a "thick" sense and a "thin" sense. The thin sense yields enjoyment 'primarily in virtue of the physical appearance of the object', including surface properties, while the thick sense 'involves not merely the physical appearance of the object but also certain qualities and values which the object expresses and conveys to the viewer.' <sup>18</sup> The associations of the thick sense are not those of the individual but those of the community at large: the 'life quality' of the beauty is embodied in the object. Thus an object in its thick sense expresses good life values, the values of the community.

With reference to thick and thin beauty, Carlson introduces the idea of plastic trees, claiming that they are okay in the thin sense but that in the thick sense they 'represent bad life values', suggesting a combination of ingenuity and resignation. While Carlson admits that it is false to 'assume a positive correlation between an object's being natural and its being aesthetically pleasing' <sup>19</sup> (an admission he later retracts by asserting that *all* nature is beautiful - I shall take this up in the final chapter), he does seem to claim the opposite, namely, that unnatural objects masquerading as or hiding among natural objects are aesthetically displeasing. Furthermore, they are displeasing in the thick sense, that which, for Carlson, contains considerations of environmental ethics, among other things.

I am going to elaborate on the idea that plastic trees are somehow unethical intruders into nature's rightful sphere. Plastic trees may, as Carlson asserts, have bad life values, but he fails to argue about how or why this is the case. In addition, by expanding Carlson's claim into an example of my own, with a variation or two, I hope to demonstrate that nature's naturalness is not necessarily an ethical prerequisite to aesthetic pleasure and, more crucially, that aesthetic pleasure taken from nature's beauty has more to do with specific surface features found in nature than with our assumptions about its non-human genesis. This is, of course, where I depart from Kant, but where Schopenhauer's ideas of harmony in manifold impressions begin to surface. But before

proceeding to considerations of nature's surface properties, I turn to plastic trees.

## 2. Plastic and Other Sorts of Trees

### (i)

My example will include at least two important elements which Carlson leaves out of his examination of plastic trees, i.e., the passage of time and a context for experiencing the trees. Carlson's biggest mistake is assuming that the mere artificiality of the plastic tree renders it unethical or inferior to real trees. By assuming this he leaves himself open to critical opposition which undermines an otherwise good idea. So, picture if you will a wood in summer, fully green and scented with the last flowering of lilacs and wild garlic. In the wood is planted a plastic tree, a cleverly designed, tastefully scented, perfectly textured replica of the real thing. The plastic tree blends well with its neighbours at this time of year and no one can tell by looking at it that it is not a real tree.

(1) A day tripper comes into the wood, stops for a rest, and finds the place beautiful, including the trees in his immediate area. The plastic tree is among the trees found beautiful. The day tripper rests and savours the beauty, and eventually gets up and returns to a home well beyond the wood.

(2) A wood dweller, over time and after many walks in the wood during summer and autumn, notices that the plastic tree remains unaffected by seasonal changes and that it looks/feels/smells the same as it did in summer. She concludes that the tree is artificial. Here are some of her possible responses.

(a) The plastic tree looks/smells/feels out of place in a displeasing way; the wood dweller feels distaste (thin beauty denied)

(b) The plastic tree offsets its neighbours in a provocative and interesting manner because of its obvious differences; the wood dweller takes pleasure in the scene (thin beauty affirmed)

(c) The tree offsets its neighbours in an interesting way but, despite recognising a bold set of relations and patterns, the wood dweller feels no pleasure because of what the tree is and its associations for her community (thin beauty denied, thick beauty denied)

(d) The tree offsets its neighbours beautifully, the wood dweller feels pleasure in the effect, but feels guilty for liking it and thinks she ought not take pleasure in it, despite the fact that she does (thin beauty affirmed, thick beauty denied)

(3) The day tripper returns late in autumn, discovers that the tree is not natural, and experiences any of the above reactions, with the added possibility that he feels disappointed simply because the tree is artificial.

If the day tripper feels disillusioned simply because the tree is not natural, we know that his original pleasure was tied, at least in part, to the idea of observing nature (let's assume he won't even consider the tree once he knows its fake). And, if the tree looks ugly or ridiculously out of place, then the situation is unproblematic: the scene has changed perceptually and is no longer pleasing due to shifts in surface features. However, if the tree offsets its neighbours in a way that is not distasteful or ridiculous, despite its artificiality, Carlson would still condemn it based on its bad life values. Carlson is both unclear about what these bad life values are and inexplicit about the reasons for his condemnation. Essentially, he doesn't say enough about why plastic trees should always be offensive or how their bad life values inform aesthetic perception.

What is it about the tree that offends? If it looks interesting despite its artificiality - perhaps it is the result of an arts council commission, a witty piece of environmental art that "comments" on the nature of seasonal change and acts as a pointer within it - then it cannot be the mere artificiality that makes it unethical. Carlson uses the idea of *plastic* trees to make his point and it is here that we might find some clues about the relationship between life values and aesthetics. Plastic is a non-biodegradable substance that relies on the use of questionably-obtained fossil-fuels for its creation and has carcinogenic properties under certain conditions. In reality we have found that it is not an ecologically-sound substance since it does not break down in a manner conducive to the health of the planet or its creatures. It is also used in large amounts and, while practical and sometimes irreplaceable for many, is often wasted, thus symbolising the consumption and arrogance of our age. Carlson's tree is offensive because it is a *plastic* tree, not because it is artificial and certainly not because it necessarily looks out of place in a displeasing way.

What if the tree were cleverly made of "all-natural", biodegradable, non-toxic, ecologically inoffensive materials. Would it still connote bad life values? I think not: in order to decide on the status of the tree in this case, we would look to the way it fits into context throughout the seasons. If the result were pleasing - if the all-natural though artificial tree were a good work of art - then there would be no *ethical* reason to disparage it. Its artificiality poses no threat to the wood or

the community as a whole. As for the intrusion of art or artifice into nature, we cannot object to the tree on this account, for art in the woods is often a pleasing phenomenon. Human towns and cities are intrusions into what was once a wilderness. And, while we wouldn't want to populate all of our woods and wild areas with whimsically tasteful bits of art, there is no blanket objection to doing so in some places. Each case must be decided, both ethically and aesthetically, on an individual basis (unless of course the wood in question is a protected area of wilderness - there might then be *lawful* reasons to avoid putting the artificial tree there).

Back to the plastic tree. If a naturalist comes along, tests the tree and allows that it is plastic and environmentally damaging, we might find ourselves unable to enjoy the tree any longer (wood dweller reaction (c) ). A shift in our knowledge about the tree leads to an alteration within Carlson's "thick sense" of appreciation. It can also lead either to our "seeing" the tree differently (we begin to focus on flaws or notice new displeasing features), or, despite there being no perceptual changes in the tree, to our appreciation being blocked/dissipated/overwhelmed on emotional grounds. The "thin" sense of appreciation is therefore affected.

However, it is also conceivable that a person might continue to enjoy the tree despite its now-apparent hazardousness (wood dweller reaction (d) ). If enjoyment and appreciation are unimpeded by the knowledge of the tree's threat, and this strikes us as unethical or inappropriate, we still cannot *make* someone stop feeling pleasure: either one does or one doesn't, after the advent of information, continue to enjoy the tree. Perhaps we might like to attach conditions, like the wood dweller, saying something like, 'I do enjoy this tree but I know that I shouldn't do so'. This is a possibility but I view this approach as muddled because it fails to clarify what is at stake in such a situation. Again, in introducing plastic trees Carlson fails to make explicit the ultimate context into which they are put.

(ii)

An attitude that expresses continued enjoyment in a wilfully destructive situation despite knowledge of that destructiveness is indicative of a lack of harmony between the perception of beauty and the greater value of life itself. This disjunction between pleasure and the context of pleasure is at bottom irrational. To appreciate wilfully destructive situations is to approve them and continued (or universalised) approval of this sort would lead to the destruction of life itself. The context of aesthetic pleasure is *life* - appreciating something aesthetically means, in part, appreciating its *existence*. What Carlson means by bad life-values is the sense that an object or event, by its very nature, inhibits the continuation of life in a frivolous way (I don't mean that *all* life should *always* be sustained - but that planetary life-sustaining processes should be



safeguarded). Plastic trees, being human products of dubious origin and material, are distinctly destructive components in a dangerous way of living, a way of living that might ultimately lead to the end of living. And, as Carlson notes, 'when we are actually *unable* to find an object aesthetically pleasing in the thick sense *because* of the (negative) nature of its expressive qualities, this often makes aesthetic enjoyment of it in the thin sense psychologically difficult, if not impossible.' <sup>20</sup>

Carlson is correct here. Appreciation of what might have seemed beautiful does become difficult in light of certain information, information that makes explicit the life-denying nature of the object. <sup>21</sup> Still let us consider another example, a familiar one, in order to investigate possible disjunctions between aesthetic pleasure and the continuation of life. We witness the detonation of a bomb over a distant city. If I feel pleasure in the sight without knowing the nature of its existence (I think it is some meteorological event), then my pleasure is innocent and unblameworthy, since I do not and cannot know through perception alone the real nature of the cloud.

If my friend the physicist informs me, after I have engaged in an appreciative awe, that the cloud is the aftermath of a process, invented by people, that is or will soon be killing thousands of humans and other creatures, I am again in a position to experience various feelings. A quite obvious response would be a dramatic shift in appreciative perception, one which not only disallowed seeing the cloud as a natural event but one that made my perception of it unpleasant or even horrific. The extreme life-denial of the event would almost certainly make an impact on my aesthetic sensibility. However, if I continued to see the cloud as beautiful after acquiring information about it, my response might be seen as perverse. Carried to its most universalised conclusion the presence of such clouds leads not only to the destruction of aesthetic appreciation but also to the foundation of that appreciation - life itself. Finding beautiful that which will obliterate any possibilities for the perception of beauty is irrational. The emphasis here is not on what we take *from* nature so much as what we put *into* it, unnecessarily.

However, ethical constraints on aesthetic appreciation might not be an issue of knowledge so much as an issue of value. People are irrational all the time. Seeing the bomb cloud as beautiful might be disturbing but if one does see it as beautiful, what does this suggest? It could indicate an exaggerated sense of one's own experience of pleasure at the expense of the unnecessary suffering of others. In such a case we would be inclined to say that the person not only possessed an underdeveloped sense of life's value but that he or she lacked a sense of proportion between aesthetic experience and its context of life. Like Huysmans' hero is *A Rebouer*, such a person would have life serve the aesthetic rather than the more rational and moral converse.

This attitude is ethically suspect since it elevates personal pleasure over respect for life generally, and intellectually unsound since universal support for life-denying processes of human origin leads to the cessation of aesthetic experience whatsoever. Though plastic trees are less obviously threatening than the clouds of bombs, their implications are nevertheless clear. To approve of whimsical plastic trees in nature is to approve of a frivolous practice which is life-denying. The aesthetic appreciation of plastic trees, rather than serving life-enhancement, which is the natural purpose of aesthetic pleasure, is conducive to life-denial and the wilful destruction of its own pleasure.

### 3. Life Denial and Human Intervention

#### (i)

The experience of beauty is one component of a fulfilling life. A commitment to life-enhancement will include aesthetic pleasure and intellectual clarity, along with the preservation of the planet's resources and a proper treatment of the creatures and communities on it. Aesthetic pleasure is one thing that makes life worth living, though not at the expense of life itself. Thus, the 'enjoyment of the spectacle of evil is repugnant to the aesthetic life though it is unfortunately possible to derive a quasi-aesthetic pleasure from the contemplation of human vice and depravity.' 22

While we are able to "enjoy" fictional depictions of vice and depravity, or documentary films which portray their horror effectively, it is plausible to claim that we should not enjoy actual instances of vice and depravity when they are literally and explicitly life-denying (i.e., when they involve the real and needless suffering of human beings or other creatures in our care). To what degree can we say that there are ethical limitations on what *ought* to be enjoyed?

Mary Mothersill thinks that there is a limit to our tolerance: nothing can be beautiful unless it is a cause of pleasure but a work can also be painful enough to extinguish all thoughts of pleasure and hence beauty. <sup>23</sup> Here I would suggest that Mothersill's claim could do with a distinction between what *can* happen and what *should* happen. I believe we can say that objects or events which are wilfully and frivolously life-denying *should* cease to give pleasure once their character is known. <sup>24</sup> Information about the character of such objects doesn't necessarily dissipate pleasure, but often it will, and furthermore we expect such dissipation of pleasure from the kind of person who has a developed sense of life's priorities. Another set of examples should illustrate what I mean.

If I am witnessing a spectacularly-coloured sunset from my kitchen window and am taking great pleasure in its beauty, how shall I respond if a friend drops in and informs me that the reason

for all the colour is the proliferation of pollutants in the air? Suppose she also tells me that the pollution emanates from the factory up river and that it will cause serious damage to the marsh downstream, let alone to our lungs. Mothersill would be right if she said that we can't say I shall, without question, feel vexation and the cessation of pleasure. Perhaps I shall continue to admire the sunset despite my new knowledge. Yet, I ought to feel vexation and a cessation of pleasure. Why? The colourful spectacle which I admired springs from a process that is not only destructive but *wilfully* so, the result of human decision. To continue to admire the sunset would be to lend aesthetic approval to that which is wilfully and frivolously life-denying.

If, on the other hand, my friend informs me that the colour is the result of a live volcano that has erupted unexpectedly, but that it is causing harm to the community around it, should I still feel vexation and a cessation of pleasure? I might, but the *imperative* to do so would not be present as it is in the previous case. Human beings have no control over the volcano, nor is the volcano a responsible member of the moral community. The consequences of the eruption might be drastic and painful enough to mitigate any pleasure I may feel about the colour, but there is no *obligation* for me to cease admiring the volcano (though there might well be an obligation to stop admiring it and get on with the business of helping those in danger). A factory that pollutes is a moral affront; a volcano that pollutes is regrettable but not blameworthy.

In the case of the volcano emitting pollutants, it may or may not be appropriate to dwell on the beauty, depending on other obligations we have ( the obligation to save life or prevent further damage if we can , for example), but in the absence of obligations which call us away from contemplation, it would not be wrong to admire the sunset after the eruption. One could say, 'What a beautiful sunset. What a shame it is that the beauty was produced in such a manner.' However, to say the same thing about a factory that pollutes would be hypocritical: the "manner" of production was under our control and didn't have to have the effect it did. To endorse processes which needn't be endorsed (aesthetic appreciation is a form of endorsement, of approval), processes which result in the unnecessary destruction of the environment, is life-denying.

Once can sense the beauty of a volcano and feel compassion for those who must live with, or are destroyed by, the damage it leaves behind (the awe in the face of powerful natural events can be part of the pleasure itself). However, the anger we ought to feel at a factory that inflicts the same damage should, in any person endowed with a sufficient idea of life's worth, militate against feeling any pleasure in the spectacle. Bopal horrifies, a hurricane astonishes. It's not that ethics and aesthetics don't intersect - clearly they do,<sup>25</sup> with all aesthetic activity being subject to ethical concerns to some degree (whether directly, in the case of the factory, or contingently, in the case of dwelling on beauty when we've more pressing obligations) - but that aesthetic appraisal isn't

derivative of ethical values. Subject to, yes. Subordinate to, in the big picture, always. But derivative of, no. The moral law might prevent us from appreciating certain phenomena but it won't determine ahead of time what phenomena please or displease in the first place.

(ii)

Ethically undesirable objects will often seem aesthetically displeasing but our perceptions change as our ethical beliefs change.<sup>26</sup> A portrait depicting a homosexual couple might have been rejected as immoral a century ago but be accepted as quite lovely today. Nature itself has gone in and out of aesthetic fashion, coming in again as our ethical attitudes toward it change. Human intervention in nature need not, of course, be a negative influence - a walk in the woods is a benign form of intervention if we so much as crush a twig or pick a mint leaf - it is the method of the intervention that is subject to ethical appraisal rather than the concept of intervention itself (except, again, where intervention has been lawfully banned by consensus).

Quite contrary to the idea that human intervention in the natural environment is a bad thing is the notion that tasteful and respectful interventions in the form of art and constructions of natural materials can be a good thing, due to their reinforcement of our being both part of, and especially responsible members of, the planet (in the stewardship fashion). Of course some areas of wilderness or countryside should remain untouched. But the "naturalness" of such places is a misleading concept for aesthetic appreciation: such areas are left alone for many reasons and beauty is usually not the primary one.

If we recall the example of the artificial tree made from "all-natural" materials, it will be remembered that, short of the useless idea of opposing all intervention, there is no *a priori* ethical reason to disapprove of the tree. And, if the tree cannot be distinguished from its neighbours during its initial residency, then there can be no perceptual reason for finding the tree offensive. Finally, should the tree be gradually distinguishable from the real trees in an interesting and aesthetically pleasing manner, then again there is aesthetic reason for disregarding the tree. The reasons we *can* find for finding the tree repugnant are those of personal objection (I was attached to the idea of the wood's being natural), those of an altered sensuous surface (it just doesn't look good), or those of some more pressing *ethical* concern (it's true that this tree isn't harmful or displeasing but the state plans to replace the entire wood with trees just like this). I have already shown that personal factors, while often a part of aesthetic *enjoyment* or displeasure, have no place in aesthetic *judgements* about nature. Once again, the alteration of the sensuous surface emerges as the primary aesthetic consideration in shifts concerning the beauty found in nature.



The inclination of Allen Carlson to make naturalness a key to aesthetic pleasure in nature - and science a key to discerning that naturalness - leads us up the wrong path. While considerations of genesis are welcome tools insofar as they help us to perceive the details of nature's aesthetic surface more clearly, it is that surface itself, apparent to us in perception, that should be the focus of specifically *aesthetic* studies. Woods are differentiated from cities not only by facts about their genesis but also by the sounds, smells, sights, textures and even tastes within them. Yes, there is the danger of replacing all natural areas with synthetic substitutes: thankfully, our skills are not up to replicating nature in all its aesthetic complexity but, were aesthetic arguments alone not enough to ward off the encroachment of strip-mines or shopping malls, we could turn to ethical principles to limit our actions. We need not compromise ethical values for aesthetic ones - no matter how interesting the toxic waste sculpture, it should be rejected - but neither can we confuse aesthetic matters by making them provinces within the discipline of ecology or the political objectives of nature preservation.

### III. JUDGEMENTS AND COMMUNICATION

#### 1. Human Constraints on Appreciation

While there are ethical constraints on aesthetic appreciation generally, a non-perceptual awareness of nature's naturalness is not one of them. However, there are other, more mundane constraints that inhibit genuine judgements about nature or any other phenomenon. Indigestion, prejudice, a chemically induced state of altered consciousness, are all things that can lead to or inhibit aesthetic experiences, but these experiences are falsified, diminished or of something quite other than what people without these dispositions would observe. The question is, what makes one judgement about nature's beauty more genuine than another judgement?

As we have seen, Allen Carlson wishes to make judgements based on scientific categories the most legitimate. Others might cite those judgements derived from the principles of art to be most valid. Kant and Schopenhauer would balk at both approaches, preferring to focus on the object or event as it presents itself to us in perception. Before any of these, we might say that a person wishing to observe and estimate the beauty of nature should seek a reflective tranquillity. It is difficult to see or appreciate much of anything if you are worried or in great pain.

What is required is a certain stance or disposition, tranquillity without languor, receptivity that is not entirely passive, concentration that is

unimpeded by anxiety - in short, what came in the nineteenth century to be called the 'aesthetic attitude'.<sup>27</sup>

We might also say that certain dispositions disqualified one from levying public critical judgements (a person who is extremely hard of hearing should not be taken on as the local paper's concert reviewer). Either way, judgements must begin with a mind and body that are relatively free from sickness, prejudice or impairment, if they are to have relevance to anything beyond one's personal enjoyment.

As remarked earlier, changes in the conceptual context of a judgement might yield a resulting change in attitude or appreciation. While I have borrowed the entire idea of shifts in appreciative perception from Kant and Schopenhauer (and Dewey), I disagree with their conclusions in practice and have attempted to show why such shifts are important with regard to nature and yet not nearly so straightforward as they first appear. In situations where shifts occur, associations and assumptions need to be unearthed so that the genuinely aesthetic component of appreciation can be distinguished from a hybrid of the aesthetic and other factors.<sup>28</sup> For instance, it might be good to try and articulate one's reasons for holding that an item is beautiful: this is one test of a judgement's genuineness, but a test rather difficult to pass when the object is nature.

The dearth of contemporary philosophy about the beauty of nature is due not to a lack of experience so much as an insecurity about communication. By communication I mean not only the form of expressing what one perceives and thinks, but also the way in which one has been encouraged to approach the object at all. The language we use to describe nature is highly visual because we have been taught to "filter out" most of nature's other aesthetic features. For this reason many people believe that nature's beauty cannot be described so well as depicted, which may be true, though it doesn't explain why we limit discussions of nature's aesthetic impact to the way it *looks*. Schopenhauer and Kant, of course, limit themselves to the visual and aural manifestations of natural beauty, and both discern a special link between art and natural beauty. What is unclear is whether this relation tells the whole story about what is aesthetic in nature, i.e., whether art captures what is most worth observing in nature, thus making an experience of nature itself unnecessary.

Conventional theories about nature tend to rely too heavily on art (and hence the bias towards the visual or aural). If we want to learn to talk about nature, there is no substitute for "getting into" the environment. Flexibility of perception precedes flexibility of language. If we don't yet have the facility for speaking about nature's unique aesthetic impact, it may be that we do not yet know our object well enough. Art can direct our perceptions in a limited way but as a guide to environmental aesthetics it is insufficiently equipped to represent the range of nature's beauties. I shall suggest a

more comprehensive approach to nature's beauty in the chapters that follow.

## 2. Judgement and Articulation

Schopenhauer feels that art is a mode of communication, a way of expressing the artist's perceptions of nature. No doubt this is true: one need only look at a Van Gogh to see poplars more vividly, or listen to a Paul Winter composition to learn the cry of a loon in the wind. Kant's ideas about communication are less accessible. Because of his restriction on the use of concepts, it becomes difficult to show how a critic or observer is supposed to articulate their findings about an object without presenting their views as induced by causes or the accumulation of proper principles. Both Kant and Schopenhauer recognise that objects occupy cognitive spaces and that shifts in these contexts can affect judgement. However, neither one reduces aesthetic judgement *to* its cognitive context, such that rules, principles or causal mechanisms yield certain aesthetic results. Our task becomes one of how to discern good judgements from bad ones, aesthetic practice from non-aesthetic, without forcing aesthetic judgement into a cognitive straitjacket.

In order to keep the discussion of natural beauty within the realm of aesthetics (and to avoid recourse to systems where non-perceptual factors determine appropriate appreciation), I shall focus on those features of the natural environment that make it a unique *aesthetic* or perceptual object. At some point these features will become familiar and enter the language more readily than they do now, and as they do become more familiar, they will be cited as *reasons for* making certain judgements about nature. Mary Mothersill confers beauty on an individual 'if and only if it is such as to be a cause of pleasure in virtue of its aesthetic properties.'<sup>29</sup> In this chapter I have attempted to delineate what role may be played by non-perceptual factors in aesthetic judgement, with special emphasis on the ethical dimension and how it should be understood. I shall continue to refine the notion of aesthetic judgement by clarifying the idea of an "aesthetic property" and by developing it in deference to Kant and Schopenhauer, whose assertions about the non-logical, non-scientific character of aesthetic judgement will be defended.

## NOTES - CHAPTER SIX

- <sup>1</sup> Most recently, Yrjö Sepänmaa, *The Beauty of Environment: A General Model of Environmental Aesthetics* (Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1986).
- <sup>2</sup> Allen Carlson and Barry Sadler, (eds.), *Environmental Aesthetics: Essays in Interpretation* (University of Victoria, 1982).
- <sup>3</sup> Yuriko Saito, 'Is There a Correct Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature?' *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 18(4): 35-46, 1984.
- <sup>4</sup> Allen Carlson, 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgement and Objectivity' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 40(1): 15-27, Fall 1981.
- <sup>5</sup> Carlson, 'Is Environmental Art an Affront to Nature?' *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16(4): 635-650, December 1986, p. 639.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.640.
- <sup>7</sup> Carlson, 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgement and Objectivity', p.23.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Neil Evernden, Review of 'The Beauty of Environment' by Yrjö Sepänmaa (see above) *Environmental Ethics* 10(2): 183-186.
- <sup>10</sup> See Carlson, 'Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature' in Salim Kemal (ed.) *Nature, Landscape and Art* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 1992).
- <sup>11</sup> Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* , p. 390.
- <sup>12</sup> Saito, 'Is There A Correct Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature?', p. 38.
- <sup>13</sup> On a global scale it is obviously incorrect to mistake nature for art. Our gross inconsideration of animals and communities within the natural environment, as well as natural processes, has already led to disastrous consequences which will only get worse if we continue to treat the planet as a piece of technology.
- <sup>14</sup> Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* , p. 399. Other references to Mothersill in this section will be cited in the text.
- <sup>15</sup> Sepänmaa, p. 145.
- <sup>16</sup> Yuriko Saito, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature* , p. 19.
- <sup>17</sup> Allen Carlson, 'Environmental Aesthetics and the Dilemma of Aesthetic Education' *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 10: 69-82, 1976.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 75.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 73.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 78.



- 21 I am grateful here to Dr. Paul Davis, who has developed the concept of life-denial in a different direction than I do, in his unpublished paper 'Life and Life Denial in Aesthetics' (1988). Says Davis: 'Where an essential part of the aesthetic moment is the acceptance or reinforcement of beliefs or attitudes which are life-denying, then the aesthetic moment itself is life denying.' (p. 3)
- 22 Haig Khatchadourian, 'Natural Beauty and the Art of Living' *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 16(1):95-98, 1982, p. 96.
- 23 Mothersill, p. 411.
- 24 I understand here that "life-denying" might be vague with reference to things like the killing of animals for food or the chopping down of trees for paper. Because I do not attempt to address the extremely complex issues surrounding animal and biospheric rights in the thesis, I am not able at this juncture to define the field of beings or objects whose lives would be denied in destructive situations. However, my assertions hold for any field so defined: the use of the term "frivolous" has been used to indicate the taking or denying of life where it was neither necessary nor justifiable. In addition, one can here read "life-denying" as a kind of behaviour or action that leads to the wilful or wanton destruction of the earth generally, as opposed to the specific destruction of any one species group (though the human species is often implied) or individual.
- 25 Again, I don't wish to suggest that the content of representational art is subordinate to ethical approval. I am referring to something more direct here: whether or not the actual manner or mode of the work's presentation leads aggressively to life-denying consequences. "It is art" is not an immediate justification for an object's character. If a piece of sculpture is visually interesting but made of toxic waste, it shouldn't be approved no matter how innovative its technique - it's threatening!
- 26 Saito, 'Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', p. 169.
- 27 Mothersill, p. 48.
- 28 Rob Elliot gives several such examples of shifts in his article 'Faking Nature', examples which, regrettably, I cannot discuss here.
- 29 Mothersill, p. 347.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT: PROPERTIES, JUDGEMENT AND ARTICULATION

#### I. THE ABSENCE OF RULES AND PRINCIPLES

##### 1. The Non-Scientific, Non-logical Character of Aesthetic Judgement

(i)

One of Kant's and Schopenhauer's biggest legacies to aesthetic theory is their insistence on the unique character of the aesthetic judgement. Rather than being derived from rules or measured against given standards, aesthetic judgements arise from an almost mysterious consonance between an object or event *in perception* and our feelings about it. Logic allows us to judge whether claims are possible or correct; science helps us to predict and determine reactions. A different kind of knowledge issues from aesthetic, as opposed to scientific or even practical acquaintance: the knowledge of objects in their capacity to please in perception alone. Physicist Mitchell Feigenbaum rejects the continuity of scientific and aesthetic knowledge - the kind promoted by Carlson - in James Gleick's book *Chaos*.

to accumulate that much detailed information, I think is wrong. It's certainly not how a human being perceives those things, and it's not how an artist perceives them. Somehow the business of writing down partial differential equations is not to have done the work on the problem...<sup>1</sup>

Aesthetic appreciation is rooted in the way the world appears. The accumulation of facts is not essential.

One way to think about the difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic judgements is to realise that we mean different things when we say we can't "make sense" of something: when a meteorologist says they can't figure something out, what is disputed is not the importance of the facts at hand but what they *indicate*, or how they relate to a body of related knowledge. When a person in front of a painting says they can't make sense of it, it is not only the relation between the painting and the world at large that is at stake, but also the presentation of the painting itself, i.e., what it *means*. Aesthetic judgements don't presuppose canons or rules or laws with which an

individual's response must accord. W.E. Kennick uses the example of a knife to support this claim. One can have certain criteria for a good knife, and these criteria can be specified because a knife is a functional object and the capacity to fulfil that function will determine what features a knife must possess to be a good one, that is, to do its job. Works of art or beautiful nature have no similar "job" to do. They are judged in their capacity to please in perception but no formula will lead one to compose a beautiful object, as a formula can produce a good knife, nor can one cite the presence of certain features and declare *a priori* that an object will be beautiful. 'There is not in all the world's criticism a single purely descriptive statement concerning which one is prepared to say beforehand, 'If it is true, I shall like the work all the better.' <sup>2</sup>

Aristotle tried to delineate the rules of good drama using the play *Oedipus Rex*. However, Aristotelian "correctness" can be compatible with failure, while wonderfully imaginative works of art can contravene the rules. <sup>3</sup> This means that there is no way to *verify* whether or not an artwork is 'good', or beautiful, by testing it against a set of standards. We can, for example, verify whether or not Kennick's knife is a good knife by asking whether it has certain features or capacities, or sufficient conditions. And, we can verify whether or not a geometric object is a square by asking if it is made up of two sets of equidistant parallel lines set at four right angles; that is, the mathematical conditions for squareness. Sibley notes that the application of aesthetic concepts or judgements does not function in either of these ways. <sup>4</sup> This raises the question of what standards, if any, aesthetic judgements employ.

(ii)

Mothersill claims that a principle of taste 'would be a generalization that, if valid, would provide deductive support for a verdict, that is, for the judgement of taste under its normative aspect.' <sup>5</sup> In rejecting principles, like Kant and Schopenhauer, she rejects the subordination of aesthetic knowledge to the truth of other, non-aesthetic facts. For example, the Golden Section formula has often been cited as a "reason" for finding certain objects in nature beautiful. This formula uncovers interesting facts about certain natural objects: sections of some plants and flowers display two unequal parts but the small part is proportional in size to the larger, as the large part is to the whole. Some people claim that this proportionality is inherently attractive to human beings and that we not only find it beautiful in nature but also, we have modelled architectural standards after such proportions. Other instances of mathematical regularity in nature are the union of complementary opposites (spiral patterns growing in opposite directions, as in the daisy-face) and the Fibonacci Series (where the ratios of proportion in Golden Section formulas continue to add up to the next number in the proportion - 1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc. - resulting in .618 when any number is divided by the next, or 1.618 when any number is divided by the previous one). <sup>6</sup> These 'magic formulas', as Mothersill calls them, are appealing as explanations for our reactions to beauty in

nature, but their effectiveness as determinants of our responses disappears when we realise how diverse and ephemeral much of nature's beauty is in comparison to these neat formulas. In addition, such formulas tell us little about *how* something is beautiful. Even if we know in advance that a sunflower will exhibit the Golden Section formula, we won't know before we see it if it is beautiful.

Sibley, for one, agrees that there are no rules which determine ahead of time what will be beautiful, though he does think that there might be negative conditions governing the application of certain aesthetic predicates. However, in order to understand what Sibley means by 'conditions', it is important to recognise that his context is fully aesthetic. Consider, for example, a square. If X is a square, it will not contain three 60-degree angles. X does have three 60-degree angles, so X is not a square. Is this what Sibley means by the presence of negative conditions in aesthetic judgement? I don't think so.

If X is garish, it will not be made up entirely of abstract pastels. X is made up entirely of abstract pastels, so X isn't garish. While logic can be employed negatively in a way, it is not infallible here (art breaks rules: who says pastels may not one day look garish, even in abstract form?). Sibley is speaking less about this kind of reasoning than about *characteristic* attributions of adjectives. It is, perhaps, possible for a painting to come along and be garish, even though it is entirely composed of abstract pastels. Unlikely, but possible. Sibley's negative conditions indicate a kind of characteristic incompatibility between the concept of 'garish' and the features described. He is not concerned with deductive reasoning so much as aesthetic practice. '...[T]o say that features are associated only *characteristically* with an aesthetic term *is* to say that they can never amount to sufficient conditions'.<sup>7</sup> This applies to negative as well as positive characteristic conditions. What this claim of Sibley's does is help us to distinguish good from bad judgements: if an art critic calls a painting gentle and a ten year old calls it lurid, the ten year old is not automatically wrong but may in fact be less competent in the application of aesthetic predicates. Understanding the characteristic conditions for the application of certain words leads to more intelligible and accurate assessments.

This means, that critical aesthetic judgement is not about deducing or proving or levying verdicts. Margaret MacDonald offers a useful definition of criticism (which, while she applies it solely to art, may also be applied to any aesthetic object, nature included, as I shall argue later).

Criticism is, therefore...an indefinite set of devices for 'presenting', not 'proving', the merits of a work of art. It has none of the stability of logical truth, scientific method, legal and moral law. It varies with time, place and audience, while not being completely subject to their limitations.<sup>8</sup>



The stability of scientific or logical judgements comes from the independent nature of the facts involved in them: we can agree on what makes up a right angle or a set of parallel lines, or when *modus tollens* is violated. However, agreement on the very features of art or beautiful nature - those elements that give rise to aesthetically-relevant predicates - is nowhere near as straightforward as discovering a square, because, while the relevant criteria for judging geometric figures are independent, the same criteria for judging beauty are *interactive*.<sup>9</sup> This means that the features of an aesthetic object, presented differently, yield a different aesthetic object the next time around. A square is a square is a square, but is one Monet just like another?

## 2. Singularity and Perception

### (i)

The rejection of deductive or scientific verdicts indicates that the kind of judgements one makes in aesthetic appreciation are not about criteria in general applied to specific instances, but about individual objects in a subject's field of apprehension. That is, aesthetic judgements are *singular* judgements. Again, observe the difference between an aesthetic judgement and one of the following kind.

You ask, 'Is Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 (Not marble, nor the gilded monuments/ Of princes, shall outlive this pow'rful rhyme) a Petrarchan Sonnet?' The question demands that we refer to a set of criterial features, in this case, those which determine the Petrarchan form of the sonnet. Since Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 is in octave form *abba abba*, followed by a sestet, *cde cde*, it cannot be a Petrarchan Sonnet, the conventions of that form being three quatrains *abab cdcd efef*, followed by a couplet, *gg*. Despite referring to a form within literary art, such a judgement is not aesthetic but an outgrowth of logical reasoning.

You can also ask, 'Is *this* a sonnet?', referring to Shakespeare's Sonnet 55, and 'Is *this* a sonnet?', referring to a wee poem I worked up last night, and get the same answer (yes), based on criterial features, to both questions. However, if you ask that trickiest of questions, 'Is this a good sonnet?', about either or both poems, then even the question can be taken in two ways. One way would be to interpret 'good' as indicating the presence of criterial features in perfect balance, not a rhyme or rhythm out of place, a well-constructed sonnet. In this case my sonnet might be as accomplished as Shakespeare's - which should immediately signal that there's something wrong with our use of the word 'good' if we do indeed intend it to be used as a term of aesthetic merit. This first sense of 'good' is not quite as criterially-oriented as the question of whether or not a poem is a sonnet; but neither is it a purely aesthetic question if what we mean by the term 'good' is 'skilful'. My poem may be a sonnet and it may even be a skilful sonnet but this does guarantee

its aesthetic success (one might even say that 'skilful' is a euphemism for 'uninspired' when it goes uncoupled with more declarative expressions like 'beautiful', 'moving' or 'awe-inspiring'). So what else do we mean when we ask, 'Is this a good sonnet?'

The second sense of 'good', though perhaps supported by the presence of features which conform to structural criteria, does not issue from that conformity. While the reasons I give to show that Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 and my sonnet are Elizabethan Sonnets can be exactly the same - I invoke the presence of the correct criterial features in both cases - the answer to why Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 is a good, or beautiful, work of art, will *never be the same* as any answer given for any other work or object, unless that object is entirely identical to the Shakespeare Sonnet 55. This difference between answers which justify the merit or aesthetic impact of one object and another - this completely unique justification in the face of any object's beauty - is due to the singularity of aesthetic judgements. What makes Shakespeare's sonnet and my sonnet, sonnets, is one thing; but what makes one beautiful, and the other pedestrian, is another issue altogether.

(ii)

Crucial to the idea of singularity is the ability to reidentify the object of your aesthetic assessment. This means that any evaluation you give of an object's beauty, any judgement about it, will depend inextricably on the relations and interactive properties that make the object unique. There is no substitute for experiencing the object yourself: 'verifying' an object's beauty means getting before (or into, or in contact with) it and acquainting yourself with its properties in relation. The same set of concrete features arranged differently (imagine the words of Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 switched around) yield different relations and hence a different aesthetic object (Sibley's interactive dimension of aesthetic judgements). '...[A] description known to be applicable to a particular must involve some reference to a particular with which we are acquainted, if our knowledge about the thing described is not to be merely what follows *logically* from the description.' <sup>10</sup> Even if the scrambled words of Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 turned out to be a sonnet nonetheless, the recognition of its formal description would tell us nothing about it as an *aesthetic* object (it may be a disaster!)

So, the aesthetic object, be it of art or nature, is always *this* object or event in the moment of judgement. We don't talk about clouds or rivers - we talk about *this* cloud or *this* river (remember Kant's tulips and roses), and in the present tense of here and now, when we first make our judgements. Alaska is part of the United States of America but I don't need to go there to judge whether that is true (do they have flags? Are their road signs like ours?), nor do I need to go to Washington D.C. to witness the documents declaring Alaska an American state. However, if my

friend tells me that Alaska is beautiful, *I* can't claim that on behalf of Alaska unless I go and experience it myself (and not just because I doubt my friend's judgement). This is why we say 'It's *supposed to be* beautiful' instead of 'It's beautiful' when we haven't been to a reputedly beautiful place or seen a work of art: the claim is an impostor for an aesthetic claim, which assumes personal acquaintance.

An aesthetic object is impossible in the non-specific sense in which one can refer to 'a book' or 'the book on the table' without having any particular book in mind. That kind of reference is supported by the independence of the object referred to and the possibility of believing in it without having a direct experience of it.<sup>11</sup>

It's not enough to describe the aesthetic object to someone else and expect them to share or understand what you mean when you say it's beautiful. The features that make an object beautiful are located perceptually and recognised there as well. Referring to the Grand Canyon on a map of Arizona is one type of recognition; referring to it singularly, in the presence of its unique aesthetic features, is another. We don't say, 'Canyons are beautiful', we say, 'This canyon is beautiful'. Saying 'The Grand Canyon is beautiful', when you have never been there, is little more than benign gossip, and possibly even tantamount to lying.<sup>12</sup>

(iii)

Lots of people say that the grand Canyon is beautiful. If my friend says it's beautiful, but I have never been there, should I believe her? Keep in mind that we are often disappointed by artworks or places that have been proclaimed by others as beautiful, and that we don't continue to claim beauty for the object if we've seen it and been disappointed (we don't say 'It's beautiful but I don't think so'. Again, we might say, 'It's supposed to be beautiful but I don't see it', or 'Many people think it's beautiful; I don't'). If discovering something's beauty were like discovering whether or not my poem is a sonnet, then we could take others at their *word* when they claim something is beautiful. However, as has been shown, beauty does not operate independently of perception, and discovering it is not something that one person can do and then inform the rest of us.

Even if we did rely on others for our "aesthetic opinions" (social conversation is largely made up of such masquerades) we would have no great confidence or certainty in our professions.<sup>13</sup> "*Middlemarch* is excellent." "Yes, I think so too. What do you like best about it?" "Umm...the character development." "Oh, yes, it's so subtle. The way Dorothea discovers that her own

self-deception is as much to blame for her bad marriage, as Casaubon's conceit, is deftly handled, don't you think?" "Absolutely. Would you like an olive?"

Aesthetic judgement - genuine judgement - starts with acquaintance. But does it finish there? Is my judgement as reliable as Roger Scruton's? We go to the National Portrait Gallery together and look at a picture of David Hume. He loves it, thinks it's beautiful, and I think it's horrible, insultingly simplistic. We're both acquainted with the picture - let's say we take a little test afterwards and not only do we each correctly reidentify the portrait from among others like it, but we describe the portrait accurately enough such that a ten year old child can point to it on a wall of Hume portraits. Whose judgement is correct? If we're both right then aesthetic judgement is no more than an 'I'm okay, you're okay' style of pop psychology applied to beauty. However, if you want to decide who is correct, what would you do? Immediately disqualified as a standard for deciding (despite Hume's own opinion on such matters) is Roger Scruton's established status in the intellectual/aesthetic realm: his being famous for writing good books on aesthetics doesn't make his judgement better than, or more genuine than, mine. So what would lead to support for his, or my, judgement, in the face of opposition?

In addition to engagement with the object in perception and a mind and body open to its impact, we utilise critical *reasons* in defending our judgements about a work or place. If you read an account of Scruton's judgement, followed by an account of mine, what you should do first is march down to the Portrait Gallery and look at the Hume painting. After doing so, re-read the accounts and try to see which is most rooted in the work itself, and which makes most clear the relations and features you see in the work. Of course, these reasons will not be the same kind of reasons given to back up the claim that Sonnet 55 is an Elizabethan Sonnet, or that the Alaska is part of the United States, but they are reasons nonetheless. Getting to them is the difficult part.

They can't be given without acquaintance in the first instance, and they are most effective in the presence of the object, because aesthetic reasons function as verbal *pointers* in judgement: they are linguistic devices that direct our attention to features of an object, devices that have little or no meaning outside of their perceptual, aesthetic context (think of listening to a lecturer demonstrating *how* a painting's composition produces beauty: "Now look heeeeeere. See the way this line is followed from the lower left corner right up to the sky at the top."). 'Whatever abilities and beliefs it requires, it ultimately rests on my own perceptual experience, which means that pointing out features, prompting new aspects, redescribing, comparing this work with another - which is how we argue about experience - will *always* be relevant to questions of aesthetic valuation.'<sup>14</sup> In the remaining sections of this chapter I shall attempt to elucidate the way reasons work in aesthetic judgement, allowing us to discern a good judgement from a bad one on the way to experiencing nature's beauty. My discussion includes an analysis of the difference between aesthetic qualities



and properties, and the significance of *articulating* one's perceptions of aesthetic properties.

## II. PROPERTIES, QUALITIES AND REASONS: ANCHORING JUDGEMENT

### 1. Reasons and Judgements

In the previous chapters I discussed the role of non-perceptual factors in aesthetic judgement and concluded that their relevance must be tethered to, and illuminate, the object in appearance. This leaves us with the question of what *does* count - what reasons, if not those stemming exclusively from non-perceptual considerations, can we give for declaring an object to be beautiful or aesthetically worthwhile? Again, we can compare contrasting approaches.

Kennick takes the interdependent view with regard to reasons, claiming that the ability of an object to help a political struggle might make it a good work of art to a Marxist but not to a bourgeois aesthete. Similarly, a picture that contains a nude might be dismissed by a prude but welcomed by others.<sup>15</sup> Aesthetic judgements are thus dependent upon ideological or psychological factors and can be justified with reference to these. However, the difficulty which always arises with this view is its neglect to acknowledge the ability of people to learn to see beyond their own personal commitments and assumptions, to recognise beauty *beyond* the bounds of their previous experience. In addition, such a view looks away from the object as pleasing in itself, towards the object as fulfilling a certain function (promoting the class struggle) or falling under certain standards (puritanism) - both contravene Kant's and Schopenhauer's claim that the beautiful object pleases without interest or rule.

Interdependent views fail to acknowledge that certain *features* in an object may make it beautiful and that the greatest aesthetic service a critic can render is not to cite the work as lending itself to some higher purpose or standard but to direct their audience's attention towards these good-making, or beauty-making, features of the aesthetic surface of the object.<sup>16</sup> This does not mean providing people with the ability to pronounce a work good or an object beautiful in virtue of memorised, canonical features. Rather, it involves bringing individuals to *recognise* how certain features in relation lead to the recognition of its beauty.

Arnold Isenberg says that a good critic helps us to understand why we like a work or object and that the moment *of* this understanding is like 'a second moment of aesthetic experience'.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the "that's good" aspect of being brought to understand *why* one likes an object is itself ill-equipped to clarify the notion of reasons in aesthetic judgements. Sibley remarks on this, noting that aesthetic judgements as straightforward verdicts of good or bad are seldom applied to things

like sunsets, animals, faces or people.<sup>18</sup> He does not discuss evaluative judgements but focuses on aesthetic judgements generally, judgements which rely on discerning *qualities* inherent in the objects and artworks. Sibley's enterprise is a valuable one. We often *overemphasise* "good" and "bad" in relation to predetermined standards, and clearly such standards have no place in nature: while critical "feedback" might help an artist to do better work in the future, or educate the audience, it will hardly do to tell nature to do better next time!

Yet, even in those objects mentioned by Sibley - animals, sunsets, faces - we *do* seek to articulate why a thing is aesthetically worth our while or attention. After all, aesthetic appreciation takes place in a finite context and the limitations of time and physical capability force us to make choices about how and where we shall spend our energy. It seems to me that verdicts in the sense of critical feedback are useless when applied to nature, but critical reflection about the *way* a place or sunset is beautiful, may help us to allocate our time and attention more fruitfully. I shall examine possibilities for explaining and justifying certain types of aesthetic judgements in the following sections.

## 2. Sibley: Taste and Qualities

### (i)

A confusion exists in aesthetic theory about the way reasons function in judgement, arising from the vague and often interchangeable uses of the words "quality" and "property". What some people mean by quality, others mean by property, and vice-versa. However, the function of qualities and properties as *different* aspects of the aesthetic object can be clarified, and I shall start with Sibley's precise account of aesthetic qualities as given in his papers 'Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic', 'Aesthetic Concepts' and 'General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics'. Sibley's discussion of aesthetic qualities has had almost universal influence, most recently seen in an anthology of essays devoted to the topic, *Aesthetic Quality and Aesthetic Experience* (ed. Michael Mitias).<sup>19</sup> What interests me most here is the difference between aesthetic qualities as set out by Sibley, and aesthetic properties as developed by Mary Mothersill in *Beauty Restored*, and what implications this difference holds for aesthetic judgements about nature. In what follows, I shall analyse Sibley's and Mothersill's theories in anticipation of developing my own theory, which takes a different approach to the use of both qualities and properties in discussing aesthetic judgement.

My approach offers claims about the domain *and* justification of judgements. Mothersill praises Sibley's contributions to discussions about aesthetic judgements but she also criticises them

for not going far enough. Part of the reason Sibley does *not* seem to go far enough, on Mothersill's terms, stems from his practice of being less concerned with verdicts and more concerned about "what we do" when we *make* judgements, about what's involved. Because I am inclined to side with Mothersill in her claim that we do make the kind of judgements which differentiate between beauty and non-beauty - that we take our judgements as being serious and binding for all similar subjects - I cannot be satisfied with Sibley's account of aesthetic qualities. Yet, Sibley's theory orients *talk about* judgements in an important direction, a direction which is necessary to Mothersill's version of aesthetic properties. While I ultimately reject Sibley's identification of qualities, I draw on one aspect of his account in forwarding my own.

(ii)

Sibley claims that we tether aesthetic 'concepts' - like graceful or garish - to non-aesthetic, perceptual features - like a Ming vase *curve* or a canvass of lurid *colours*. Aesthetic concept terms don't lead to verdicts but instead show how we operate in critical aesthetics. By merely drawing attention to those easily discernible features which make the painting luminous or warm or dynamic, we succeed in getting others to "see" these qualities too. 'By realising that, whether we are dealing with art or scenery or people or natural objects, this is how we operate with aesthetic concepts, we may recognise this sphere of human activity for what it is.'<sup>20</sup> Taste is required to discern aesthetic qualities and apply aesthetic terms. Some words do double duty (have both literal or functional meanings and aesthetic meanings - morbid, energetic, etc.) while others have a primarily aesthetic meaning (graceful, garish). But, while the *vocabulary* is fairly familiar to most people, the exercise of a refined taste is relatively rare (though, as with Schopenhauer, almost everyone can exercise a kind of simple taste to some degree). Finally, taste does not come down to personal preference but reflects the ability of an individual to *see* or *notice* or *understand* how certain concrete perceptual features give rise to specific aesthetic qualities.

There has been stimulating controversy<sup>21</sup> over the relation between Sibley's aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities and features<sup>22</sup> - the parasitic relation, or what Mothersill calls the "supervenience" of aesthetic qualities on non-aesthetic features<sup>23</sup> - and the ability to exercise taste. John Fischer, in his essay 'Experience and Qualities', thinks the emphasis on taste obscures the nature of qualities.

We can only use aesthetic terms, which designate aesthetic qualities, if we have an ability to *notice* or *see* or *tell*. His choice of *taste* to characterize this sensibility to the presence of aesthetic qualities in things is an unfortunate and ambiguating factor in the analysis...<sup>24</sup>

Mothersill, while praising Sibley's theory as one of the best, queries his "tethering" of aesthetic qualities to perceptual features and criticises the idea of a special taste in the first place, because the connection between qualities and features is neither logical nor causal.<sup>25</sup> I think that there is a way to understand aesthetic qualities which avoids the problems attributed to Sibley's account. If we see aesthetic quality-words as *descriptive*, as a device for making clear important features in an object (rather than picking out qualitative properties of an object), then we no longer encounter the difficulty of articulating the relation between *types* of property or quality, i.e., non-aesthetic features and aesthetic qualities.

This device is used with more or less facility by certain people in their attempts to bring others to see beauty or aesthetic qualities. In Sibley's account, aesthetic qualities are specific properties of an object; quality-words pick out these properties. On my view, aesthetic qualities as special properties of objects are abandoned, but quality-words are retained, *for the purpose of describing the aesthetic impact of perceptual features*. Sibley locates qualities, while I use quality-words to clarify the *ways* that an object's perceptual features function aesthetically. Aesthetic quality-words further our understanding of the impact of such features by articulating *how* a feature presents itself in a certain context. Quality-words enhance our ability to *talk about* the ways an object strikes us in perception. A colour is not just blue but vibrant, a musical phrase not just played in 3/4 time but wittily. The remaining problem is, why emphasise such descriptive devices at all, if 'qualities' are reduced from being *actual* properties of objects, to being the mere inspiration for critical-language tools? Mothersill would say that we talk about how objects strike us in perception because beauty is a basic human good, something we seek to avow and perhaps even share. Aesthetic quality-words make it possible to characterise an object's aesthetic *properties* - the features (colours, sounds, words) that, in relation, bring about its beauty. From this point onwards, when I refer to aesthetic qualities, I shall intend my own interpretation (descriptive devices) rather than Sibley's, unless otherwise mentioned.

### 3. Qualities and Properties

#### (i)

Sibley works from the assumption that critical activity is a natural outgrowth of human perception: without a basis in our natural abilities we would never comprehend or be able to use aesthetic terms (much like Schopenhauer). He also separates questions about qualities from 'questions about verdicts on the *merits* of works of art'.<sup>26</sup> Mainly, Sibley investigates how we



bring others to see aesthetic qualities [his version] by pointing at perceptual features. My version of aesthetic qualities provides linguistic support for the critic or educator who helps us to realise and describe the relations among perceptual features, features which make an object worth considering. We "know" aesthetic quality words and the critic uses these words to convey the character of perceptual features, engaging in what Eva Schaper calls 'the constructive use we make of concepts...the aesthetic use of concepts.'<sup>27</sup> What we construct is a sameness of aesthetic vision.

Keep in mind that perceptual features and aesthetic qualities are *indexical* in judgement. Aesthetic quality-words are descriptive of *an* object's aesthetically-important perceptual features; they express *how* some features present themselves *here*. Sibley is reluctant to go beyond aesthetic concepts into levying verdicts about an object's aesthetic impact<sup>28</sup> and he emphasises taste and the qualities [his version] it picks out, rather than perceptual *features* which give rise to those qualities [his version]. Mothersill focuses not on tethered aesthetic qualities but on perceptual features themselves, calling them aesthetic *properties*. I reject Sibley's account of objects that contain both non-aesthetic perceptual properties and aesthetic qualities, in favour of Mothersill's theory of perceptual properties which function aesthetically. However, my own account of aesthetic qualities offers a way to *articulate* the aesthetic power of those perceptual properties. Without adopting Sibley's version of aesthetic qualities, I employ 'quality-words' for the purpose of making aesthetic properties clear. And, although some quality-words may evoke an object's aesthetic properties better than others, language is flexible with regard to this describing, such that the attribution of qualities is fluid and there is no meaningful sense in which 'taste' is required to discern specific and inherent 'aesthetic qualities' [Sibley's version].

(ii)

Mothersill's account of aesthetic properties, as set out in *Beauty Restored*, owes much to Isenberg's essay 'Critical Communication'. She reiterates at length Isenberg's analysis of Ludwig Goldscheider's criticism of *The Burial of Count Orgaz* (El Greco). Isenberg notes that Goldscheider's emphasis on a 'steeply rising and falling curve' directs our attention to a quality of the painting. This quality, which emerges from observation of perceptual features (in this case the objects making up the "curve"), is expressed by the idea of 'a wavelike contour' but is not really *the same thing as* that contour: it's just that the expression brings us to see the inexpressible particularity of this work.

And if communication is a process by which a mental content is transmitted by symbols from one person to another, then we can say

that it is a function of criticism to bring about communication at the level of the senses; that is, to induce a sameness of vision, of experienced content.<sup>29</sup>

The quality pointed to in communication at the level of the senses is unique to *this* work; the emphasis is on ordinary language, acquaintance in perception and a lack of *a priori* governing conditions. Isenberg's qualities convey a sense of how particular features work, and in doing so complement Mothersill's account of properties. However, Mothersill differs from Isenberg, and from Sibley, over the issue of commendability: she wants to put all this talk about aesthetic judgement and quality to greater "use".

Sibley, as we know, does not discuss verdicts. Mothersill finds this puzzling<sup>30</sup> and also criticises Isenberg for being satisfied with proceeding to the level of implicated avowal but ignoring the normative aspects of judgement.<sup>31</sup> Mothersill extends talk about judgements to perceptual features which function to produce a qualitative effect. If perceptual features give rise to talk about aesthetic qualities, this is only because such features function as aesthetic properties in an object. And, Mothersill sees aesthetic properties as the key to making claims about beauty.

Any individual is beautiful if and only if it is such as to be a cause of pleasure in virtue of its aesthetic properties.<sup>32</sup>

Aesthetic *properties* are thus those perceptual features which function indexically and uniquely to produce beauty in an individual object.

Mothersill's theory doesn't address qualities or the *descriptive character* of features so much as the status of those features functioning aesthetically, *in an individual object or event or place*. Her emphasis is on the perceptual features and their place within critical judgement: for Mothersill, properties can be cited as reasons for claiming an object as beautiful. However, her account is strengthened by adding to it the notion of quality-words which evoke and express the aesthetic impact or character of an object's features.

(iii)

Between Sibley and Mothersill I see a difference of mission. Sibley investigates how we make non-evaluative aesthetic judgements and how we justify and explain them in virtue of genuine aesthetic qualities [his version] which differ from non-aesthetic perceptual features. Mothersill offers a theory where perceptual features function as aesthetic properties that can be cited

(non-logically) in justification of a judgement about beauty. I also think that Mothersill's theory contains an implicit acknowledgement of the claim I make here, namely, that words for aesthetic qualities enhance the critic's 'pointing' (in the process of communication at the level of the senses): we connect words we know with features we see/hear/touch, etc. Mothersill's enterprise is more sweeping than Sibley's - she explains how aesthetic judgements about beauty can be tested for their correctness - but, at the same time, talk of properties requires my version of aesthetic qualities. In order to bring others to see the beauty of *The Burial of Count Orgaz*, the critic would have to cite properties. And, while such citations can be, literally, pointed to, such pointing is most often verbal. When it is verbal, it employs quality-words to denote the aesthetic character of perceptual features.

To speak of qualities is to refer to the way properties function aesthetically. The amber leaves of autumn trees are aesthetic properties (important perceptual features) of a grove by virtue of their translucent warmth against a cerulean sky. A brown patch in the bottom corner of a painting is an aesthetic property of a picture if, by its stolid quality, it seems to anchor an otherwise whimsical arrangement and, in doing so, is the catalyst in the unique beauty of the picture. The role of language is to bring about the perception that certain perceptual features are aesthetically crucial to an object's beauty. Such features, or properties, are unique to their contexts (recall Wittgenstein's example of a facial expression: you can't have the expression without the face). The articulation of them in their contexts requires reference to aesthetic qualities.

Indeed, if we are allowed the predicate 'beautiful', it will be plausible to say that in finding something dainty, we are *making* a judgement of taste, one to the effect that the item is beautiful, as I put it above, 'after a particular manner'.<sup>33</sup>

As Mothersill notes,

[W]hat is needed is an explication that displays aesthetic properties as having the generality required of properties (as in indefinite description), allows them to figure in a subject's account of why an individual pleases him, and yet does not sanction the conception of serious laws of taste.<sup>34</sup>

My theory can be summarised as follows. The perceptual features of a thing are its colours, textures, sounds shapes, etc. Sometimes certain features have a particularly *aesthetic* 'function' within an object or event, such that their presence is integral or meaningful to that object's *beauty*. If I recognise that the brown patch in the painting makes all the difference to my pleasure in it - if it is a key feature in beauty - then I can call it an *aesthetic property* of the painting. Furthermore, if I want to show you *how* that brown patch makes its impact, I might call it *stolid* in quality and

explain how this stolidness becomes the focus of the picture, otherwise populated by whimsically abstract pastels. So, the aesthetic property (brown patch), which has the quality of being stolid, is a crucial feature in making the picture *beautiful*. I can also describe the quality or qualities of the picture as a whole, citing the interactive dimension of its properties - calling it *focused* or *anchored*. Both ways of realising qualities *in properties* rely on pointing out, to oneself or others, the relationships of the work such that those relationships make it a uniquely beautiful individual in perception.

Any theory about the beauty of *nature* can also focus on the unique aesthetic properties of nature, through the use of aesthetic qualities, as the source of any particular place's beauty. However, finding the right aesthetic quality-words, for nature, may indeed be difficult. 'If we cannot find sensible-sounding language in which to describe them, the experiences are felt in an embarrassed way, as off-the-map - and since off the map, seldom visited.' <sup>35</sup> It is true that, until recently, aesthetic theorists have not been much interested in the way we talk about nature's beauty, perhaps because the tethering relation between properties we *felt* to be beautiful in nature, and the concepts we use to describe them, were not at all clear. Too often, 'It's beautiful!' tells the whole story in response to nature and, while that's fine if one wants to limit oneself to a personal experience of beauty, it does little to help the critic or educator, who strives to bring others to experience the particular beauty in a specific way. How to talk about nature's aesthetic properties? What qualitative character can be expressed?

Words are only words in the wrong mouth. '[D]efinitions are like maps in that, while they indicate borders, rivers and roads, and are (or ought to be) a help in getting around, they do not conjure up a landscape for the imagination; they are not travelogues.' <sup>36</sup> The good critic gives us something akin to a travelogue rather than a map when bringing our attention to certain features; yet, even a map - a clear sense of what words are appropriate in the first place - is difficult to find. This raises another question: if the character of aesthetic judgement is such that the citation of properties, by virtue of their unique qualitative effect, incites beauty or verdicts thereof, *who* is supposed to make the judgements? What kind of person or critic can make an avowal of beauty? Schopenhauer is of two minds on the subject, as we have seen; Kant endows all thinking subjects with the capacity to make judgements of taste. Sibley thinks we all have some small natural capacity for discerning aesthetic qualities but that refined taste is rare. What is the relation between aesthetic sensitivity and critical judgement?



### III. AESTHETIC SENSITIVITY AND CRITICAL JUDGEMENT

#### 1. Sensitivity and Development

Despite its having been shown that Schopenhauer is not always faithful to the idea that the genius is the only person capable of true aesthetic perception, Schopenhauer and Kant are somewhat opposed in their idea of who is fit to levy judgements. Schopenhauer's conventional metaphysics does cater to genius; Kant locates the ability to judge in the very composition of human mental faculties. Sibley, like an echo of Schopenhauer, has it both ways. All have some small capacity to judge but genuine taste rarely surfaces. And, to some degree, Hume's

pronouncements about the requirements of the 'true judge' are useful here - we're unlikely to trust the public pronouncements of a known philistine, but then again, we should be sure not to trust Roger Scruton's judgement automatically at the expense of our own.

Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the standard of taste and beauty. <sup>37</sup>

These requirements don't seem so completely out of reach of the ordinary observer; much of it strikes me as a matter of practice, like most skills. It's the 'delicate sentiment' part that leaves many people puzzled: without lapsing into an unpalatable elitism, we can ask if our own judgements are best left guided by the more tasteful pronouncements of others. Or, in different words, how far can we trust our own judgement and what 'qualifies' one to judge at all?

One danger of automatically relying on others to lead the way is that 'an interesting and moving art work can go to pieces, before anyone other than a critic who is too tired to be interested or moved by it, has seen it.' <sup>38</sup> The artworld and its labyrinthine references - or the world of scientific categories - can in weaker moments remove a possible aesthetic object from our view but such a removal doesn't make the object in question devoid of beauty. Institutional endorsement does not equal aesthetic merit but the trouble is, representatives of institutions are able to articulate reasons for their acts - even if such reasons are flimsy or irrelevant. One can have all the 'delicate sensitivity' in the world but, without the ability to *articulate* one's findings, how valid is one's aesthetic assessment, even on a personal level?

It does seem to be true that aesthetic responsiveness, or taste, inheres in human imagination (young children respond to colours, sounds, textures) but differs as to the degree of development or sophistication. Sibley's justification of this, in his claim that education would be impossible without some natural measure of responsiveness, is a solid one. No matter what one's level of aesthetic education, however, it is always relevant to ask *why* one finds an object beautiful, what *reasons* one has. We rely on critics to articulate their reasons for certain judgements, but often, we may disagree with their judgements but be unable to say why. The relationship between eloquence and aesthetic sensitivity needs clarification. Does one necessarily reflect the other? Or, while being justified in demanding reasons for *public* critical pronouncements, must we assume that the ability to articulate reasons indicates the presence of sensitivity, and ineloquence, a coarse nature?

## 2. Sensitivity and Eloquence

(i)

Starting from the idea of ineloquence - the inability to articulate the reasons for finding an object beautiful - we can discern two ways of interpreting a failure to say much more than "it's beautiful". One type of ineloquence I shall call *sensitive ineloquence*, and refer by it to that state of aesthetic rapture in which one is rendered speechless by the enormous aesthetic impact of an object, or where one "sees" the presence of an aesthetic quality without being able to cite a chain of "causes". Sibley says that 'a person might notice that something is graceful...without yet knowing or being able to specify exactly the reason why.'<sup>39</sup> Here we have the presence of that elusive endowment, 'taste', without the facility of articulation. One can locate grace but not be able to say why it occurs in this instance. This may be true but of course it's not very helpful for the student of aesthetics: if a sensitive but ineloquent critic tells us something is graceful but can't tell us why, are we to take their judgement on faith?

Wittgenstein also mentions sensitive ineloquence in his *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. He talks about situations where one has the impression that something is 'indescribable' in its aesthetic presence; he has 'in mind a case that saying one is incapable of describing comes from being intrigued and *wanting* to describe'.<sup>40</sup> In this case Wittgenstein, like Sibley, assumes that one has the sensitivity to locate aesthetic merit or uniqueness but that this very uniqueness makes describing it difficult.

In contrast to sensitive ineloquence, where genuine taste is temporarily befuddled by aesthetic innovation or singularity, there is a second brand of ineloquence, *ignorant ineloquence*. Wittgenstein again remarks on a lack of eloquence in the face of an aesthetic object but this time his emphasis is on the deficiencies of the observer rather than on the deficiencies of language.

When we make an aesthetic judgement about a thing, we do not just gape at it and say: "Oh! How marvellous!" We distinguish between a person who knows what he is talking about and a person who doesn't.  
41

For Wittgenstein, knowing what one is talking about translates into knowing the rules: 'if I hadn't learnt the rules, I wouldn't be able to make an aesthetic judgement.'<sup>42</sup> While a person ignorant of harmony might be able to discern discord within a composition, only the musically-trained person would be able to articulate why a composition was aesthetically worthwhile, or how (in virtue of which aesthetic properties) it makes its aesthetic impact.

The difficulty with Wittgenstein's view is that it presupposes that acquaintance with the rules will refine one's taste and alter one's judgement. Sibley points out that refined taste is rare, implying that rule-acquaintance might be a good thing but doesn't guarantee the cultivation of "taste", which for him appears to be a gift of nature. Nevertheless, both Sibley and Wittgenstein differentiate between sensitive ineloquence and ignorant ineloquence. Ignorant ineloquence betrays the lack of either innate ability or education in aesthetic matters and in doing so disqualifies one's limited proclamations as being at all indicative of genuine aesthetic sensitivity.

(ii)

So, Sibley and Wittgenstein share a sense of some people as being more qualified to judge than others, based on their ability to articulate either the presence of aesthetic qualities or the rules for applying certain qualities in specific situations. Marcia Mulduer Eaton and Mary Mothersill both attack the idea of specially qualified judges in aesthetic matters. Eaton goes after Sibley, rejecting his idea of taste on political grounds ('It has been too easy to equate the class of people who have taste with the elite or power class') as well as on an empirical one. She uses the example of a bright red cardinal perching on a barren branch in winter snow, to claim that anyone who saw such an event would take aesthetic pleasure in it. She notes, 'No special sensitivity is required; no special curriculum would be a prerequisite for the pleasure.'<sup>43</sup>

I think Eaton is correct to caution us about the elitism of "taste" as the province of the privileged and I also agree that a situation like the one of a cardinal on the tree would be fairly pleasing, for obvious reasons, to almost any observer. However, Eaton fails to acknowledge the difficulty of "getting into" some artworks or unusual landscapes at a level appropriate to them, that is, a level at which their unique aesthetic properties become apparent. She ignores the necessity for *developing* one's aesthetic perceptiveness in response to the demands made by some more complicated objects. Sibley too acknowledges the pleasing aspect of simple art or familiar natural scenes, but he goes on from this to say that we *begin* with these only to extend our perceptions and vocabulary to wider ranges of objects and experiences. In this sense, Eaton also misses the subtle implication of Wittgenstein's assertion, namely, that we are more likely to learn something from someone who knows what they are talking about, than from someone who doesn't. No special training is needed for some objects, but for others, we need the guidance of someone who has experience in observation.

Nevertheless, "knowing what one is talking about" isn't a straightforward matter of being eloquent, or being able to cite rules or traditions. Mothersill says that the requirements for being a true judge of aesthetic merit don't inhere in the ability to articulate reasons. Rather, we start with the idea that a person finds *something* beautiful, that is, has the capacity to perceive beauty and



take pleasure in the perception.<sup>44</sup> In this way the qualification to judge isn't the result of special training or rarefied sensibility, but the simple acquaintance with beauty and the feeling it inspires (i.e., Kant's approach to judgement).

Of course, Mothersill's use of the term 'beauty' as a *standing* concept, to represent broadly all types of aesthetic impact or any instance where we are moved by an object in appearance, is controversial. Wittgenstein thinks that in 'real life, when aesthetic judgements are made, aesthetic adjectives such as "beautiful" "fine", etc., play hardly any role at all.'<sup>45</sup> This is true if we take "beauty" to be a specific *type* of impression or quality - the Addisonian or even Kantian sense of delicate, harmonious form - where it functions as one specific predicate among others. By contrast, Mothersill's use of beauty as a *standing* concept means that she employs it as a predicate where we may substitute, for the specific properties productive of beauty, the qualities involved. If something is dainty, it is beautiful after a certain manner. What all aesthetic experiences have in common is the experience of beauty, where we recognise beauty as being a relation of properties productive of the feeling of pleasure by virtue of their apprehension. We don't *talk* about 'beauty' because the experience of it governs the entire aesthetic context. I adopt Mothersill's use of the term here, with a modification to be elaborated in the next chapter.

On Mothersill's account, the person who says "How marvellous!" in the face of beauty isn't necessarily ignorant or insensitive to the aesthetic relations of an object. It is true that saying "marvellous!" is simply an interjection in the face of an aesthetic object, but an interjection unsupplemented by reasons, while not a good public judgement or teaching technique, doesn't always indicate aesthetic ignorance.

Though in matters of taste, as elsewhere, there is a difference between honest, considered opinion and mere chatter, there is no *principle* that will enable us to draw the distinction in practice. Neither topic nor manner of speech affords a reliable clue: serious things are said lightly and witless banality pronounced in a solemn tone. <sup>46</sup>

Successful discernment of aesthetic properties is compatible with ineloquence: self-satisfied bores can drone on for ages without enhancing our aesthetic perception, while an inarticulate but sensitive student might be able to point out features which catalyse our vision. The implications of this are twofold.

One, if an eloquent aesthete insists on overwhelming you with technical reasons as to why a work is trite or imperfect, but you continue to find it beautiful, there is no need to distrust your judgement if you find their claims unconvincing. Just because you cannot as yet articulate your own sense of an object's beauty does not mean that this sense is invalidated by the proclamations of a more sophisticated technocrat. It simply means that you should try to understand the relations

which produce the sense of beauty, and try to indicate to yourself, by some means or other, what those relations are (this is one way to test your judgement as being aesthetic: are the relations perceptual? Or do I like it because it reminds me of something else?). 'All of us begin by being inarticulate in the face of beauty, and if we learn to speak to good effect about one or another of the arts, it is only through training and practice.'<sup>47</sup> Training and practice help aesthetic discernment. However, the verbal results of training and practice without genuine sensitivity can sometimes be disguise for a lack of aesthetic sensitivity.

This brings me to the second implication of the uncertain relationship between eloquence and discernment. The public pronouncements of aesthetic judges - people whom we recognise as representing the artworld or some other body of aesthetic opinion - need not be taken on faith. There is a way to verify the correctness of *any* aesthetic judgement and that is by testing it against the aesthetic surface of the object judged. In this way, an inarticulate response to beauty can be valid, if it indeed reflects an awareness of perceptual relations, while a seemingly erudite opinion of an expert can be rejected as irrelevant, when it makes forays into topics not linked in some way to what is apprehended. Criticism is the judgement of beauty whether personal or public; associations are other kinds of imaginative endeavours. Criticism as a vocation, however - as a sustained series of public performative acts - requires eloquence in a way that personal judgement doesn't. In this way, training and practice often reveal themselves in the ability of the critic to direct our attention to aesthetically relevant properties - something a sensitive but unschooled observer may be unable to do.

### 3. Criticism: Assessments and Performatives

#### (i)

The difference between private and public judgement is that the public judgement requires, in addition to sensitivity, creative imagination to enable one to communicate one's impressions to others. Yet, not all public judgements are in fact good aesthetic judgements: as mentioned, irrelevant considerations can enter into the most eloquent of expositions. In this way, '[o]ne must distinguish critical activity based on the aesthetic objects themselves from a secondary criticism which is a cultural phenomenon.'<sup>48</sup> Public critical acts are what Dabney Townsend calls "performatives". They function within cultural institutions and are intended to be received by others. Townsend distinguishes these performatives, some of which may be genuine aesthetic judgements, from critical activity in the aesthetic sense, where genuine knowledge claims are made about an object, whether publicly or privately. One need not engage in performatives to offer a genuine critical judgement.

A critic is one who, given a complex experience, can identify the aesthetic possibility in the referential thought and thus bring that aesthetic object forward as itself an object of experience in its own right. Everyone is potentially a critic, but it is relatively rare that critical practice is developed. Every experience which involves singular reference is structured so that an aesthetic object is possible....critical conferral defines a new object so that it occupies an actual place in the mental life of a person...<sup>49</sup>

So, a tree might be an object of one's experience, but the tree as an aesthetic object is a unique element in experience, one with its own set of properties and relations. One has such relations in view in critical conferral but the conferral needn't be a performative. Performatives require the articulation of one's findings (and are not always correct, despite being public); critical conferral requires only that one realise the aesthetic potential of any given object in perception.

(ii)

Therefore, the inarticulate observer may engage in critical activity without being able to describe the reasons for that activity, while the Critic (capital letter denotes public performative Critic) relies on language to convey their findings. Wordsworth offers a description of the critic who has no place in the public sphere. It is important to keep such a description in mind because, while facility with language is crucial for public Criticism and pedagogy, and a goal towards which all serious lovers of beauty ought to strive, it cannot be seen as a principle whereby we can judge who possesses, and who lacks, aesthetic sensitivity. After all, elitism coupled with impatience may blind one to the inarticulate sensitivity of another: on a social scale, such a state of affairs leads to the establishment of a specious, institutionalised snobbery that has hegemony over more genuine and sincere aesthetic responses.

Others, too,  
There are among the walks of lonely life,  
Still higher, men for contemplation framed,  
Shy, and unpractised in the strife of phrase,  
Meek men, whose very souls perhaps would sink  
Beneath them, summoned to such intercourse:  
Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power  
The thought, the image and the silent-joy;  
Words are but under-agents in their souls;  
When they are grasping with their greatest strength  
They do not breathe among them. <sup>50</sup>

One further reason for rejecting ineloquence as a measure of a person's aesthetic insensitivity, is the fact that most of us are extremely inarticulate in the face of *nature's* beauty. At present, the quality of critical writing about nature is uneven and often inchoate, not least because many thinkers look beyond the aesthetic surface of the natural environment in order to make judgements

about it. However, just because our verbal ability isn't as yet up to a proper invocation of nature's unique aesthetic relations, doesn't mean that such relations don't exist, or that we don't observe them. Aesthetic activity which focuses on nature becomes an effort to articulate the properties and relations that we do find within it. Such articulation needn't be limited to locating qualities and *isolated* impressions in reference to a single object. Beauty as a function of properties in mutual relation can be predicated of natural environments, predicated and justified by effective reference (verbal and physical) to aesthetic properties.

Of course, we might ask, why bother with beauty? Isn't it better just to exercise our intellects and improve our perceptual flexibility by learning to speak about the qualities found in natural environments? In many ways the academic aesthetic enterprise is already limited to this kind of activity but I believe that the motivation for engaging in critical activity at all stems from something more than mere intellectual accomplishment. We seek beauty because beauty gives us pleasure; the beauty of nature affords a unique pleasure in virtue of the relations of properties found within it. In the next chapter, I shall explore the role of pleasure in the apprehension of beauty, moving from that to an exploration of the way nature's unique aesthetic properties bring us pleasure in our apprehension of them

Thus far, I have emphasised the non-logical, non-scientific character of aesthetic judgement, as suggested by Schopenhauer and Kant, and I have demonstrated *how* aesthetic judgements do not proceed according to rules or reasoning that are relevant to other kinds of knowledge. Furthermore, aesthetic judgements are singular in response to individual (intentional) objects: one must be acquainted with the object in perception in order to judge, and the justification for the beauty of one object will never be the same as the justification for another, unless the objects are indistinguishable in appearance. Aesthetic properties are *interactive* and, taken out of context, have no relevant aesthetic meaning.

Since, as argued in Chapters Five and Six, non-perceptual factors have no place in the justification of aesthetic judgements about nature (though they do have pedagogical significance), it is up to aesthetic properties, as articulated by aesthetic concepts and quality-words, to give weight to any aesthetic judgement. However, while the ability to understand that one's aesthetic judgement is based in the appearance itself is necessary for a judgement to be genuine, it is not always the case that the ability to articulate one's understanding is a prerequisite for sensitive criticism. I distinguish critical activity generally, that which picks out the aesthetic object through its properties in relation, from Critical performative activity, which takes place within an institution. The latter may be, but is not always, a public version of the former. Significant to both is the predication of beauty, where beauty picks out the presence of aesthetically-relevant relations and a concomitant feeling of pleasure in apprehending them.



Whether or not pleasure is a necessary factor in, or a feeling indicative of, genuine aesthetic judgement, is a controversial issue. Kant feels that it is pleasure that signals the presence of beauty, by means of a play between or movement in the cognitive faculties. Most contemporary critics disagree with him. I come down somewhere in the middle, where pleasure accompanies beauty but where not all aesthetic recognition is indicative of beauty, i.e., where the 'aesthetic minimum' is located without the spectator being moved or engaged. Just what this means - aesthetic engagement as opposed to recognition of the aesthetic minimum - will be spelled out in the following chapter.

## NOTES - CHAPTER SEVEN

- <sup>1</sup> Mitchell Feigenbaum in James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (Penguin, 1987) p. 187.
- <sup>2</sup> Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, p. 109 (quoting Isenberg).
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 110.
- <sup>4</sup> Frank Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts' in Cyril Barrett, S.J. *Collected Papers on Aesthetics* (Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 65-66.
- <sup>5</sup> Mothersill, p. 87.
- <sup>6</sup> Gyorgy Doczi, *The Power of Limits: Proportional harmonics in Nature, Art and Architecture* (Shambhala, 1981), pp. 3-5.
- <sup>7</sup> Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts', p.69.
- <sup>8</sup> Margaret MacDonald, 'Arguments Used in Criticism of the Arts' in William Elton (ed.), *Aesthetics and Language* (Basil Blackwell, 1954), p. 129.
- <sup>9</sup> Sibley, 'General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics' in John Fischer (ed.), *Essays in Aesthetics: Perspectives on the Work of Monroe Beardsley* (Temple University Press, 1983), p. 6.
- <sup>10</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 30.
- <sup>11</sup> Dabney Townsend, *Aesthetic Objects and Works of Art* (Longwood Academic Press, 1989), p. 123.
- <sup>12</sup> M.N. Rowe, 'The Definition of Art' *Scottish Philosophical Quarterly* 4(164): 271-286, July 1991, p. 284. Rowe compares the kind of belief we can have in the statement 'The Empire State Building is 100 feet high' with the kind that supports 'Milton is excellent', claiming that a profession of Milton's excellence without having read him is 'tantamount to being discovered in the act of lying'.
- <sup>13</sup> Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts', p. 72.
- <sup>14</sup> Rowe, p. 284.
- <sup>15</sup> W.E. Kennick, 'Does traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?' in C. Barrett, *Collected Papers on Aesthetics*, p. 20.
- <sup>16</sup> Stuart Hampshire, 'Logic and Appreciation' in William Elton (ed.), *Aesthetics and Language* (Basil Blackwell, 1954), p. 166.
- <sup>17</sup> Arnold Isenberg, 'Critical Communication' in Elton, *Aesthetics and Language*, p. 168.
- <sup>18</sup> Sibley, 'Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic' *Philosophical Review* 74: 135-160, April 1965, p. 136.
- <sup>19</sup> Michael Mitias (ed.), *Aesthetic Quality and Aesthetic Experience* (Rodopi, 1988).

- 20 Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts', p. 85.
- 21 For a different criticism of this distinction see Monroe Beardsley, 'What's an Aesthetic Quality?' in *The Aesthetic Point of View: Selected Essays* eds. Michael Wreen and Donald Callen (Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 94-100.
- 22 Marcia Muelder Eaton criticises 'taste' for its elitist connotations in *Basic Issues in Aesthetics* (Wadsworth Publishing, 1988), p. 37.
- 23 Mothersill, p. 254.
- 24 John Fischer, 'Experience and Qualities' in Mitias (ed.), *Aesthetic Quality and Aesthetic Experience*, pp. 5-6.
- 25 Mothersill, p. 255.
- 26 Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts', p. 66.
- 27 Eva Schaper, 'The As-If Element in Aesthetic Thought' in *Studies in Kant's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh University press, 1979), p. 119.
- 28 Sibley does consider questions of value in a limited way in 'General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics'.
- 29 Isenberg, p. 163.
- 30 Mothersill, p. 253.
- 31 Ibid., pp. 340-341. She also says that Isenberg's account is incomplete, p. 364.
- 32 Ibid., p. 347.
- 33 Ibid., p.253.
- 34 Ibid., p. 364.
- 35 R.W. Hepburn, 'The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature' in Harold Osborne (ed.), *Aesthetics and the Modern World* (Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 50.
- 36 Mothersill, p. 320.
- 37 David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste' in *Hume's Ethical Writings* ed. Alistair MacIntyre (University of Notre Dame, 1965), p. 289.
- 38 Goran Hermeren, 'The Variety of Aesthetic Qualities' in Mitias (ed.), *Aesthetic Quality and Aesthetic Experience*, p. 13.
- 39 Sibley, 'Aesthetic and Non-aesthetic', p. 146.
- 40 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Basil Blackwell, 1978), p. 37.
- 41 Ibid., p. 6.
- 42 Ibid., p. 5.

- 43 Eaton, pp. 144-145.
- 44 Mothersill, p.262.
- 45 Wittgenstein, p. 3.
- 46 Mothersill, p. 78.
- 47 Ibid., p. 351.
- 48 Townsend, p. 206.
- 49 Ibid., p. 18.
- 50 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude : 1799, 1805, 1850* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), Bk. XII, ll. 264-74.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ASSESSING NATURAL BEAUTY

#### I. JUSTIFYING CRITICAL JUDGEMENT: BEAUTY AND PLEASURE

##### 1. The Irrelevance of Pleasure

Aesthetic judgements, unlike logical judgements or the experience of physical pain, are open to interpretation. 'Judgements of intrinsic ethical or aesthetic value are apt to have some self-evidence, but not much.'<sup>1</sup> Institutional theories of aesthetic value, while popular, are nevertheless *too* dependent on interpretation, leaving it up to the caprice of Critical performers to enfranchise objects for the art world. As Dabney Townsend notes, 'one of the few things which deconstructionists and analytically-trained aestheticians have in common is an acceptance of the impossibility of aesthetic pronouncements which do not include the responder's own subjectivity.'<sup>2</sup> By this Townsend means that no one else's verdict about aesthetic value is infallible, that one must be acquainted with the object in one's own experience before deciding about the accuracy of the judgement. However, Townsend denies that beauty is a unique aesthetic predicate and, furthermore, he rejects pleasure or other aesthetic attitudes as indications of beauty's presence. 'No particular form of judgement - beauty or delight - issues from aesthetics. One cannot identify the aesthetic by a feeling; one can only discover that something is aesthetic by examining the status of the object.'<sup>3</sup>

Townsend is not alone in the rejection of pleasure as an indication of aesthetic value. Margaret MacDonald notes, "'I admit that Raphael is a great painter but I do not like his work; it does not move me.'" Such a statement is not self-contradictory, and very often true.'<sup>4</sup> T.E. Jessop concurs, claiming that one can 'admit an object to be beautiful without liking it.'<sup>5</sup> Compare these views to that of Mothersill, who introduces the idea of a person who, out of aesthetic obligation, 'sits grimly through hours of music that he loathes, or, through an effort of will, forces himself to read three poems a day. Not impossible, perhaps, but certainly not standard, and if the subject were to insist that the works to which he subjected himself were beautiful, we would be at a loss to understand him.'<sup>6</sup>

These views represent the disagreement over whether or not pleasure is a necessary factor in positive aesthetic judgements. If aesthetic appreciation is, as mentioned in the last chapter, a mere exercise in intellectual stimulation or linguistic flexibility, then claims like those of Townsend, MacDonald and Jessop are perfectly acceptable. However, if aesthetic appreciation is a special *kind*

of human experience - if in fact it is more than a simple process of making claims based on the unique conjunction of observed properties - then a view like that of Mothersill is more appropriate. Imagine the struggle to stay awake during a tedious poetry reading or the poor performance of a minimalist, atonal piece of music. If we claim that the object or event is beautiful after such an experience, our words would sound phony to those who knew our real response. So in one sense I think Mothersill is correct: when beauty is predicated of an object, it implies more than the recognition of certain properties in relation; it implies that we take *pleasure in the apprehension* of those properties. However, in another sense, Townsend and company have a valid point. It is true, as MacDonald suggests, that we can learn to recognise aesthetic merit without feeling particularly moved by it, or even liking it, but only in a manner that is derivative of the experience of beauty. It's not only that we *determine*, intellectually, that certain objects are more aesthetically compelling than others. There is a *felt difference* between the experience of beauty and other kinds of aesthetic estimation, a difference that is difficult to reflect in language.

## 2. Felt Difference: Pleasure in Apprehension

### (i)

E.M. Bartlett, in her book *Types of Aesthetic Judgement*, comes up with a term which I believe allows us to acknowledge the correctness of both viewpoints so far discussed. She thinks that not all aesthetic appreciation is aesthetically satisfying, and calls those experiences alluded to by MacDonald and Jessop as instances of the 'aesthetic minimum'. What she means by this is that properties stand in mutual relation in a way that calls for aesthetic attention, but also in a way that fails, ultimately, to satisfy.<sup>7</sup> This doesn't mean that an object we initially fail to find satisfying *isn't* beautiful. A roomful of Critics might gather and give many convincing reasons that it is, bringing us to *see* or *feel* that it is. It simply means that, initially anyway, we do not experience it as beautiful and perhaps refrain making that claim on its behalf. It's a matter of knowing when to defer to the judgements of others, without necessarily adopting their opinions. If Roger Scruton and I still disagree over the Hume portrait, but we have moved closer in our opinions - he thinks its beautiful, I admit that it has merit but don't find it moving - then I can acknowledge his expertise, and the quality of the painting, without claiming that it is beautiful (I might acknowledg that some experts do find it to be so).

Another example: after two hours in London's Tate Gallery one might well fly by the most arresting works of art as if they were no more than posters at a Tube stop. "Gallery Glut" is one of the most pervasive and yet undiscussed impediments to genuine aesthetic appreciation! Or, I might try very hard to understand and feel the aesthetic impact of a particular work by Picasso, and fail

in the end to find it beautiful. In such a case I might argue, with everyone who does claim it to be beautiful, that they are wrong, and try to demonstrate why through careful presentation of my reasons. Alternatively, I might accept that others have made genuine judgements about the work and that I, while understanding their judgements and even being able to see the relations of properties they cite in support of their claims, simply do not find it beautiful. In this latter instance, it doesn't seem contradictory to admit that the work is an important one, and that others find it genuinely beautiful, without predicating beauty of it myself. We all have our limitations, of sense as well as of attention, and there is no shame in comprehending the source of a work's merit without being personally affected by it in any more than an intellectual way. The history or theory of beauty is not cast in stone; while good judgements can be discerned from bad ones, it is not necessary for all good judgements to coalesce into a truth as evident as  $2 + 2 = 4$ . Aesthetic judgements are about clarification rather than adjudication.

Yet, if all aesthetic appreciation were reduced to this kind of response (that of acknowledging the aesthetic minimum), I think we would find aesthetics to be a rather arduous and hollow enterprise in the long run. Why? Because beauty and the pleasure we feel in its presence are the primary *motivations* for the Critical enterprise. Some people enjoy history or maths and study these areas in order to increase their knowledge, feeling pleasure in the pursuit along the way. Others find these subjects boring and struggle on with them as a means to some greater end. But almost everyone finds something, somewhere, self-rewardingly *beautiful*, and furthermore, we appear to have a desire to *share* our experience of beauty with others. Otherwise, why else should it be discussed, why else should we try to bring others to experience a sameness of vision?

Clearly art has an historical dimension, but that cannot be its only prominent feature. Art also communicates in a special way, but this too, while extremely important, doesn't tell the whole story. Aesthetics without beauty is possible but only as an educative tool. Aesthetic appreciation of non-beautiful objects is derivative of the aesthetic appreciation of beauty: such appreciation serves no function that cannot be served equally well by discursive methods, when beauty is left out of the equation. Think of skilful but uninspired paintings that hit you over the head with a 'political' theme: in the end the theme would be just as effectively communicated in words.

We learn to recognise skilful technique or clever expression in order to increase our sensitivity to moments of beauty. Beauty is not a particular type of aesthetic predicate, nor is pleasure a specific aesthetic attitude. Beauty and pleasure are the *paradigm* of aesthetic experience, and appreciation without them, while possible and even useful for teaching purposes, is more an exercise in keeping perception limber, than a self-justifying excursion into a unique and identifiable domain of human activity.

For Kant there is no beauty without pleasure, but he locates the source of *beauty* in the subject's faculties. I agree that beauty is a felt predicate, but it is also justifiable through communication at the level of the senses and estimable in virtue of its aesthetic properties. For this reason, the beauty, while subjectively felt, is attributed to an *object* rather than to a feeling in the subject: we give reasons for judgements because we think these reasons are linked to something other than our own personal taste, and we point to objects as the source of aesthetic properties because we believe the objects compel our aesthetic attention in a manner productive of pleasure. Knowing the object in acquaintance is a necessary prerequisite, as is the ability to reidentify it as a unique individual. However, these requirements can be filled without finding beauty.

Keep in mind that beauty is not a particular type of aesthetic predicate but a standing concept delimiting an object which moves us to pleasurable contemplation of its appearance. Marjorie Hope Nicolson, for example, in her book *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, is too ready to stylise beauty as a comfortable, unthreatening kind of aesthetic quality. Describing Thomas Burnett's reactions to mountains in his book *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, Nicolson notes that 'on every possible occasion, he sharply differentiated between the response to beauty and the new emotions inspired by the grandeur of Nature. Vast and irregular mountains were not beautiful, but, except for the vast and irregular night skies, nothing had ever moved Burnett to such awe'.<sup>8</sup> Like Kant, Nicolson is too ready to isolate beauty as a *style* of aesthetic presence, a particular aesthetic *quality*, rather than the standing concept behind all pleasurable aesthetic experiences. I have already argued that the sublime should be one qualitative aspect of the general predicate beauty. Here I would add that all instances of beauty, no matter what their style, carry with them the felt difference of pleasure. Pleasure is not limited to saccharine sentimentality: 'pleasure in the beautiful is multi-hued and may be tinged with awe and melancholy as with gaiety and exhilaration.'<sup>9</sup>

As a complex capacity of human beings, the ability to take pleasure in beauty has not disappeared but is, as T.J. Diffey notes in a recent paper, out of fashion for intellectuals.<sup>10</sup> In this way aestheticians do their discipline and their audience a disservice by banishing beauty, as a standing concept, to the background of experience. While talk about aesthetic pleasure rarely focuses on beauty - the whole point of Sibley's aesthetic qualities is to fill in beauty's *particular* manifestation in an individual object - beauty is nevertheless crucial to a correct understanding of the practice of aesthetics generally. Appreciation without beauty and pleasure - appreciation of the aesthetic minimum - is useful and necessary for our aesthetic training (and even beauty is diffuse and present in different degrees), but the reason for all the training is to expand our aesthetic horizons and the opportunities to experience beauty within them. Observe the 'felt difference'



between beauty and the aesthetic minimum in Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode*, a difference in this case produced by dejection and compounded by frustration.

All this long eve, so balmy and serene,  
Have I been blazing at the western sky,  
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:  
And still I gaze - and with how blank an eye!  
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,  
That give away their motion to the stars;  
Those stars that glide behind them or between,  
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:  
You crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew  
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;  
I see them all so excellently fair,  
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are! 11

One can be concerned with the aesthetic relations between properties, and be genuinely engaged in aesthetic appreciation of some kind, without experiencing beauty: it is necessary for curators, educators and even artists to exercise their aesthetic sensibilities without pleasure some of the time. Still, the answer to the question of why we do it at all is almost, as Stuart Hampshire claims, an extra-aesthetic one.<sup>12</sup> Beauty as a human good is a matter of value. We find and justify it in the relations between aesthetic properties, but we promote it as part of an enhanced human existence. In making claims about beauty we invite others to share our pleasure, to participate in a self-rewarding vision. Such claims are like a heralding, a call to others to experience yet again a universally recognisable, universally valued (except by intellectuals!) part of human life. Beauty in nature is generally an easy thing to understand; most of us know what it feels like to experience it. The problem for (public) Critical aesthetics is how to tackle the issue of natural beauty without reducing it to either a distant and inferior cousin of art, or a vague subjective feeling uninfluenced by the presentation of reasons.

## II. NATURAL BEAUTY: A PRELUDE TO JUDGEMENT

### 1. Justifying Critical Judgement as Social Practice

In the last chapter I noted that Sibley rejects 'verdicts' in aesthetics, not least because we rarely levy them in response to things like sunsets, people and faces. I also, in the previous section of this chapter, claim that aesthetic judgements are about clarification rather than adjudication.

However, Sibley and I would, I think, disagree about the role of judgement with regard to natural beauty. While I deny that aesthetic judgements must come together into the kind of scientific or logical truth resulting from deductive or inductive reasoning, I nevertheless support the idea that we can make genuine and useful judgements about the impact of natural beauty, about whether it is strongly or weakly beautiful, or not beautiful at all. In other words, if 'verdict' means rejecting deductive truths, then I also reject verdicts; but if 'verdict' means saying something about the strength or value of any particular place of natural beauty, than I support them as possible and useful.

As mentioned, criticism is not only an activity providing feedback to artists and audiences. It is a heralding to others to share our vision of beauty, to dwell in a worthwhile experience. Even this idea of beauty as worthwhile experience is not uncontroversial. Theodor Adorno thinks that it's naive to use our capacity for judgement in the face of 'natural givens', seeing the impulse to judge as an extension of human purpose to the non-human world, 'more than hubris of spirit gone absolute'.<sup>13</sup> The root of Adorno's objection to the aesthetic judgement of nature, however, is not so much his distaste for applying human standards to nature (his version of the process of judgement, not mine), as his idea that the predication of beauty is itself an unnecessarily divisive act.

It may be an atrocity of language to predicate of one thing in nature that it is more beautiful than another, and yet this atrocity is inherent in the concept of the beautiful in nature, the purpose of which is to differentiate.<sup>14</sup>

Adorno's view of aesthetic judgements about beauty makes sense only if we take that predicate to be of the 'feedback' sort, where aesthetic judgement is meant to help others improve their skills or their perceptions. I have argued that critical judgement is not limited to giving feedback, that it is like a call to others to share our experience of pleasure in an object's appearance. Yet, I take issue with Adorno over another point: the concept of differentiation. I do not see what is wrong with the admission that we find some areas of nature more beautiful than others, once the idea of our giving feedback is removed. For a start, most of us do find certain areas or places more moving and engaging than others, without supposing that the slightly less beautiful or undistinguished places should be paved over for shopping malls. Furthermore, there is an increasingly *pragmatic* need to differentiate and preserve areas of outstanding beauty in an age of encroaching development and scarce resources.

In 1969 the United States Legislature passed into law the National Environmental Policy Act, which provides protection for certain wild areas. Until that point, most environmental impact

studies noted that aesthetic values about nature were not systematised and that interdisciplinary teams of environmental experts were called upon to make decisions without the input of aestheticians or even philosophers generally. One reason for this may be that, with the exception of philosophers working explicitly within applied fields of their discipline, philosophy is less oriented towards action and decision than towards reflection and clarification.<sup>15</sup> However, I think that there is another, more obvious reason for the lack of philosophical interest (until very recently) in nature, and that is the *alienation* we have experienced in regard to both the natural environment and our own nature as human animals. The lack of attention to the natural environment in philosophical aesthetics is due in part to the pervasive neglect of the natural environment in Western societies and the philosophy emerging from them.

## 2. Observations on Alienation

### (i)

A consciousness of our general disregard for the processes and non-human communities of the natural environment is, despite the lone voices of certain individuals at any given time, relatively recent. This consciousness takes its strangest forms in the United States, where a strong heritage of natural parks (begun by Scots-born John Muir from Dunbar!) exists side by side with a rampant free market as an outgrowth of a pioneering spirit, some of which is environmentally exploitative (goldmining, oil-drilling, strip-mining). The positive concept of 'freedom' has its dark side in the individualistic lack of care, which sees the world as a resource to be used rather than the community of beings, objects and processes that it is. The false vision of the world as our resource has led to our alienation from the planet as it exists as something more than a field for exploitation and use, and this alienation manifests itself in one way through the philosophical neglect of natural beauty.

Guy Sircello thinks alienation is the great malaise of our century, linking it to a lack of interest in beauty and describing it as 'the feeling of being a stranger, of not being at home, in one's world...when we scorn beauty, or ignore it, or think we have lost it inside our heads, we have scorned, ignored or apparently lost the best and most delightful part of our world. No wonder we feel alien in such circumstances.'<sup>16</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that, if we are culturally alienated from nature - if we do not recognise the planet (with its processes) as our home in the broad sense - then philosophical aesthetics will reflect that alienation in a neglect of natural beauty as a fitting subject for study. And, once the alienation has set in, as it has been for a while now, the practice of aesthetics and other professions becomes determined more by habit than by anything else.

'Conventions about what is aesthetically significant in the environment will partly filter from analogous conventions in artistic and tourist practice'.<sup>17</sup> Philosophy is not immune from habit, at least not in philosophical aesthetics. We've been ignoring nature since Hegel dismissed it from the arena of spiritually serious aesthetic inquiry. In one way Adorno is right: our hubris leads to an attempt to cast our dominion over the earth, if not in judgement than certainly in form. The human being is fascinated by objects 'which, by their form or properties, lead him to reflect on his own powers or tendencies.'<sup>18</sup> If nature shows up in aesthetic theory at all, it is usually as a metaphorical reflection of, or inspiration for, artistic creation. We've ignored the need to know about and respect the balance of processes and communities of the planet, all the while promoting a sort of disguised barbarism with regard to things like social welfare and health care, our duties towards non-human creatures and the maintenance of a sustainable way of life.

We disown Nature in her rightful sphere only to submit to her tyranny in the moral, and while resisting the impact she makes upon our senses are content to take over her principles. The sham propriety of our manners refuses her the first say - which would be pardonable - only to concede to her in our materialistic ethics the final and decisive one. In the very bosom of the most exquisitely developed social life egotism has founded its system, and without ever acquiring therefrom a heart that is truly sociable, we suffer all the contagions and afflictions of society.<sup>19</sup>

(ii)

Despite 'disowning nature in her rightful sphere', we continue to be attracted to the *image* of nature as associated with a particular *style* of life, one that most often contravenes genuine environmental awareness. The image of our lives as being nature-conscious is particularly self-deluding; the delusion is borne out by several different aspects of our lives. Paul Santmire calls this self-delusion 'the cult of the simple rustic life' and finds it particularly officious when it promotes the saving of trees rather than inner cities, or when it co-opts nature to sell non-rustic products.<sup>20</sup> 'That beer, detergent and make-up are now called "natural" is significant. Today the name "Nature Valley" refers to a kind of breakfast cereal; cigarettes have been given such transcendentalist labels as "true", "light", "now".<sup>21</sup> Many of us know more about the *image* of the natural environment, through the products that bear nature's name, than we do about areas of wilderness or natural beauty themselves.

Even when we do manage to get out into the country or the wilderness, our choices and perceptions tend to be determined by an arm of the 'nature-image' industry, tourism. Visual enjoyment of nature 'can be little more than the acceptance of a social convention. Much of modern sightseeing seems to be dominated by the desire to collect as many National Park stickers as



possible.<sup>22</sup> The commodification of nature is not new. Raymond Williams has observed that, even for the Romantics of the last century, 'the wild regions of mountain and forest were for the most part objects of conspicuous aesthetic consumption: to have been to the named places...was a form of fashionable society.'<sup>23</sup> Adorno remarks that 'feeling nature, especially feeling nature's silence, has become a rare and yet commercially exploitable privilege.'<sup>24</sup> Often it is only those with financial resources who can enjoy nature. Those who live off the land are not always rich enough to disregard its material importance to their lives, while those stuck away from the country in cities may not have the opportunity to pay for excursions. Nature's silence, and solitude within it has become inaccessible for many people. Popular areas are overrun with people and, as Sparshott remarks, it is only the species *homo sapiens* whose presence seems an intrusion on a day in the country.<sup>25</sup>

Other thinkers have suggested that our alienation from nature is reflected in our oppression of women, because women perhaps embody the presence of 'nature' more obviously than men. The analogy between women's passion and wild nature is an old and hackneyed one, but it has been given a fresh twist by Andrew Brennan, who cites the self-directed process of childbirth as a literal instance of the 'wilderness within us'.<sup>26</sup> Brennan invokes childbirth and wilderness in a positive manner, and I agree that childbirth is an example of wilderness within us, but in the hands of feminist anthropologists the nature-woman alliance has less positive overtones. Henrietta Moore asserts that all cultures place a lower value on women because women are associated with something which every culture devalues, i.e., nature. In her book *Feminism and Anthropology* Moore provides an impressive analysis of the many ways in which women are seen to be more closely linked with nature than men, noting that the categories of nature and culture are not value free: men create culturally, women create naturally. 'The concept of the superiority of culture over nature is a Western one, and is part of the conceptual apparatus of a society which sees civilization as the culmination of "man's" triumph over nature'.<sup>27</sup> Moore points to the proliferation of nuclear weapons as the most frightening aspect of the oppression of nature because they symbolise the extent of man's belief that he can have control over everything on the planet, women and nature included.

(iii)

There are many theories about how we have *come to* disparage the earth and be alienated from it. Many of these are included in a collection of essays called *Ecology, Religion and History*, edited by David and Eileen Spring<sup>28</sup> but common to almost all of them is the idea that we have forgotten our "earth-rootedness", our emergence from and dependence on natural processes and communities. The hubris cited by Adorno manifests itself in the fact that we tend to give prestige

to those who use their minds without the participation of the body; 'there is something of King Lear's daughters in all offspring. This ingratitude is reproachable only when it turns to deny its ancestry.'<sup>29</sup> Our capacity for abstraction -a wonderful thing in itself - allows us to *forget* the rootedness of our bodies, and even our civilization, in the natural world, sometimes resulting in a loss of kinship with non-human life.<sup>30</sup> Values and experiences exist against a co-operative background of human and non-human nature. 'To realize that there is this co-operative interdependence of man and his natural environment checks the extreme of pessimism by showing our earth-rootedness even in our aspirations.'<sup>31</sup> We might be inclined to pessimism when we hear that city schoolchildren think milk comes from cartons rather than cows, but there is no reason to believe that we cannot re-educate ourselves about our dependence on the natural processes of the planet, re-educate ourselves to the degree where such processes can be respected and even celebrated as a part of our human goals and values.

We might begin to recover some of our earth-rootedness by promoting an aesthetic appreciation of nature which relies on nature's multi-sensuous surface as a source of beauty, and by taking nature's properties to be uniquely *environmental* in their collective impact on us. Seeing natural beauty as derivative of art or science fails to address the way we are pleased, as human beings, by the aesthetic relations found in our habitat. The difficulty is not to *acknowledge* the multi-sensuous, environmentally-interactive properties of the natural environment, but rather, how to reorient *our talk about them* in a manner which sacrifices neither the rigour of philosophical aesthetics nor the honest character of our experience of nature's beauty. In the sections that follow, I shall attempt to lay down some of the more important considerations for an aesthetic approach to the the natural environment, drawing on both aesthetic theory and environmental ethics in an effort to be true to the subject matter at hand.

### III. REORIENTATION: THE HUMAN BEING IN ITS ENVIRONMENT

#### 1. Adorno Against the Sublime

Any discussion of the natural environment should include an admission that the idea of 'untouched nature' is hardly a reality today: even if we do not travel into every wild area on the planet, the effects of our presence make themselves apparent almost everywhere in some form: acid rain, ozone deterioration, rising tides. Sparshott suggests that the environment figures as the overall surroundings of human and non-human life on this planet, where 'nature' is not a fictitious, untouched entity but simply that which is not deeply shaped by human beings.<sup>32</sup> In any case,

appreciation of the natural environment is that of active reflection but physical near-passivity, sustaining an interaction between human being and natural environment but avoiding any substantial alteration of the environment in the process. Moving ourselves through is fine but doing so in a small helicopter might be too intrusive and artificial. With this in mind, I shall consider two attitudes towards the natural environment, one from the continental school of philosophy and one from the British analytical tradition. The first is found within the theory of Adorno.

It is most apt to say that Adorno presents a *theory* of natural beauty, for it is little more than that, with only general relevance to appreciation - more like a political agenda for how to *think about* nature rather than appreciate it in perception. To begin with, he rejects (in contrast to Schopenhauer) the idea that uncultivated nature is something to be valued.

The Rousseauian ideology of a return to nature has discredited natural beauty perceived as appearing nature. Just how false the vulgar antithesis of technology and nature is becomes obvious when we consider the fact that it is especially those facets of nature which have not seen the least bit of cultivation by human hand - alpine moraines and piles of rock debris, for example. They look like nothing so much as those dumps of industrial waste from which the socially accepted naturalism seeks to escape.<sup>33</sup>

He also denies the aesthetic pleasure inherent in comparisons between the environment and the human scale in the sublime, dismissing the sublime as a political construct rather than a physical relation. We can demystify the sublime today;

the veneration of abstract magnitude in nature, to which Kant still adhered and which he compared to the moral law. Such a cult is a reflex of the bourgeois delusion of grandeur, of the social preoccupation with quantities and record-bests and also of bourgeois hero worship. It should not be overlooked, however, that the moment of abstract magnitude has also a positive impact, in that it is a reminder of the limits of human domination and of the powerlessness, ultimately, of the human bustle 'down there'.<sup>34</sup>

Adorno's claims are representative of certain strains in continental philosophy, where nature is more of a philosophical or political entity than a real phenomenon in our experience. While I agree with his assertion that sublime beauty can make us feel our own littleness or unimportance (what a contrast to Kant!), I disagree with Adorno's entire attitude to natural beauty, and shall here demonstrate why I think his is a wrong-headed approach to the topic, in terms of both aesthetic theory and environmental ethics.

His earlier claim, that uncultivated natural beauty is the least attractive kind of natural beauty - that it looks like debris or waste dumps - is simply nonsense, the kind of offhanded generalising that leads attention away from individual objects and particular experiences, towards the subordination of aesthetic singularity to some more comprehensive theory of human value. It is not clear that all uncultivated natural beauty is inferior to 'gardens' or modified countryside (we need only look at Schopenhauer for an equally general opinion of the opposite strand), nor is it certain that a desire to seek our earth-rootedness has been discredited by other, non-aesthetic developments. Adorno believes that reverence of our own freedom prevents us from appreciating nature *qua* nature directly - we delude ourselves if we think it possible - and for this reason we appreciate it only as the stuff on which freedom (genius) may operate. We cannot avoid domination of nature; it is inherent even in that passive reflection which sees nature as a resource for human actions.<sup>35</sup> However, these beliefs stand in curious relation to his comments about the sublime.

He admires the capacity of 'abstract magnitude' to instil in us the idea of our own limits, yet dismisses the concept of untouched nature because it lacks our freedom: what of limits now? Is freedom a good thing or a bad thing? Or perhaps just something we should face up to without deifying or trying to escape through nature-worship? Adorno's thoughts are unclear and not always consistent in tone. Furthermore, his interpretation of the sublime is an entirely intellectual one, leaving out the *physical* sense of greatness that we feel in the presence of awesome or massive entities. Adorno denies the human scale in aesthetic assessment, forgetting that the individuals in bourgeois culture don't, according to their political values, perceive themselves as smaller or bigger in comparison to natural phenomena. It may be true that certain aspects of our culture emphasise quantity: money and large houses, big cars and big television sets are symbols of human success in some circles. Still, the aesthetic relationship characterised by sublime beauty transcends cultural values and norms to embrace all creatures occupying a space of our general physical size. I find it difficult to believe that a person from a remote tribal society in South America would be unmoved by the views from atop Ben Nevis, because his society ran along communal rather than capitalist lines.

Adorno also misses the importance of our literal rootedness to the earth when he rejects nature as being unfree. Like it or not we need food to survive, rain and sunlight to grow our food, trees to build shelter. The moral dimension of that rootedness can manifest itself in a feeling of kinship towards less dominant creatures on the planet, and even extend to a kind of respect for the natural processes of biotic communities. Adorno's sense of nature is alienated from our experience of it *as human beings*, as members of a species on the planet. In this way, he neglects to orient his aesthetic theory towards nature's relevant, physical, multi-sensuous properties, and also fails to see our presence on the planet as one element in a larger whole.



One expression of kinship with nature is found in the work of T.L.S. Sprigge. Sprigge, like Schopenhauer, suggests that one reason we find even non-sentient nature appealing is that it takes us out of ourselves and shows us how we belong to a scheme which transcends our human interests. Striking displays of natural beauty intimate our oneness with nature and Sprigge sees this as a reflection of nature's inner psychic life: 'some aspects of the whole bring us back to that sense of belonging to the whole, and stemming from it, which too artificial an environment cuts us off from, thus stultifying the deeper levels of our being.'<sup>36</sup> In Sprigge's theory, which he calls 'pan-psychism', *all* aspects of nature contain and display consciousness (though not self-consciousness) at some level, and our kinship with all matter in the universe is genuine. Without here considering the metaphysical claims inherent in Sprigge's account, we can still concur with his observations about the way natural beauty leads to our awareness of our being part of a greater whole. Furthermore, it is possible to anchor an approach to natural beauty in nature's perceived and felt presence. Theories like Adorno's, which make everything an object of the political consciousness, enlighten us about our cultural values but fail to explain the specific way we *feel* in the presence of natural beauty, and the way we account for or justify our aesthetic response to it. A better approach grows out of the physical realities of our human existence, the realities of our earth-rootedness, especially in aesthetic awareness of nature.

## 2. Brennan's Ecological Humanism: A Model for Environmental Aesthetics

### (i)

In his book *Thinking About Nature* Andrew Brennan attempts to demonstrate that there is an ecological dimension to ethics. *Where* we are, he claims, influences *what* we are, and so 'what sort of options for fulfilment and self-realisation are open, are themselves context-dependent.'<sup>37</sup> Because we are in fact part of the natural world, we require contact with that world to fulfil ourselves as human beings: Brennan suggests that the first step towards an environmental ethic is our identification with nature itself, as part of , and encompassing, us. Just because the natural environment has not until now been a part of conventional ethical theory doesn't matter. Brennan defines ethical colonialism as the situation where a society of limited scope declares its findings on appropriate ethical matters to be universal, implying that our own ethical theory is guilty of such a sin in ignoring the natural element of our human existence.<sup>38</sup> I am interested in Brennan's ideas not only because they make up a useful and well-formulated ethical theory, but because they have many affinities to the kind of environmental aesthetic I wish to promote.

We don't need to embrace 'metaphysical holism' in order to extend ethical consideration to the natural environment, though again we can certainly take from it the idea that human beings share a

common lot with other earth-bound creatures in an interactive context. Our current alienation, according to Brennan, stems from our failure to acknowledge the 'double aspect' of natural phenomena: alongside familiar and highly particularised individuals are those aspects of their being which take on, or interact with, the surrounding features of their environment.<sup>39</sup> As remedy to this Brennan offers what he calls an 'Ecological Humanism', which is based in the belief that life is more rewarding when it is lived closer to ecological reality. Again, he emphasises the fact that what we are is determined in part by where we are, and uses the concept of place to reorient our views of individuals and their role within communities.

Brennan's 'what-where' function, as I think of it, has interesting ramifications for aesthetic theory, especially if we want to argue (as I do) that nature is best appreciated environmentally rather than in terms of single, isolated objects. The key to making an analogy between Brennan's ethic and an environmental aesthetic is his understanding of a thing's *properties*. Brennan begins to defend his context-oriented ethic - one which he hopes will lead to our greater identification with nature - by rejecting the idea that the natural environment is just an ontological parasite. By 'ontological parasite' Brennan means wholes masquerading as something more than simply a sum of their fundamental parts.

Just because talk of tables can be reduced to talk of table-parts, doesn't mean that tables don't exist as something in themselves. Wholes, claims Brennan, are not only *just as real* as their parts.

[C]ausally integrated whole objects are precisely those that have *genuine properties in their own right*. This is to say that they have powers and natures, and belong to sorts or kinds.<sup>40</sup>

As an example of a *failure* of two objects to coalesce into a whole, Brennan cites a compost heap next to a tree. Out of this composition there emerge no new powers or properties, nothing that is not simply one of the inherited characteristics of a single part. Environments, however, have characteristics and properties of their own.

Traditional study of natural communities has emphasised essential (biological/morphological) aspects of a community's inhabitants while neglecting their relational or interactive (supervenient) aspects. The idea of supervenience is important: a leopard seal has cusped teeth to aid in the devouring of penguins, and these teeth are an essential property of the seal. However, an environment containing penguins is a supervenient but crucial factor in determining another, *relational* property of the seal (the property of preying on penguins). Furthermore, communities themselves are more than just the sum total of their inhabitants' presence and powers.

If communities constrain, and are in turn constrained by, the features of their members, then the account of where an item is not only tells us about that item but also throws light on the nature of the system or community in which it is placed.<sup>41</sup>

The *emergent* properties of a thing are those properties that are not simply inherited from the properties of its parts. A box may be made up of brown planes in square shapes, but is itself in the shape of a cube. The cube aspect of the box is an emergent property. In the natural environment, the emergent properties are those that not only arise from the relations between objects and creatures but also from the interaction between these elements and systematic, climatic and temporal conditions.<sup>42</sup>

(ii)

If the properties of the natural environment as a scientific or ecological entity are supervenient and emergent from the interaction of inhabitants and systemic conditions, are the *aesthetic* properties of any given environment more than simply the properties, taken in turn, of its component features? I think they are: as Schopenhauer intimates in his subtext, nature is often appreciated as myriad objects in relation, a relation productive of harmony - which is itself an emergent property of a beautiful place. Brennan's theory about supervenient properties (and, in aesthetic relations, qualities) can be applied by analogy to the aesthetic dimension of nature, in a way that allows us to talk not only about natural objects but about natural *environments*, and the multi-sensuous texture of that environmental surface.

For a start, an environmental aesthetic cannot be limited to the successive observation of natural objects within any given environment, because environmental conditions include non-objects like seasonal features, weather and growth and decay. These elements add *tone* to a specific place and yield various textures over time such that one location results in a vast number of aesthetic 'objects', i.e., new wholes with new properties as a result of new conditions in relation. So, while we can talk about the Grand Canyon, we would be better off talking about the Grand Canyon in the rain, the Grand Canyon in winter, and even more specifically, the grand Canyon experienced *now*, in whatever conditions are at hand. The threat contained in this to conventional aesthetic theory concerns a place's *changing features*. More will be said about this at a later point.

A *place* may be beautiful without each and every one of its constituent parts being beautiful. The parts in specific locations or 'arrangements' have qualities that the parts themselves do not. Kant's theory doesn't account for this kind of occurrence, though Schopenhauer's subtext certainly does. Fuzzy, strange-looking plants may be rather odd seen on their own but in fact lend

discernibly powerful contrasts to a place dominated by silken yellow flowers. Of course, it's not easy to *talk* about the way natural objects and events interact to yield new wholes - I'll address this in the next section - but that doesn't rule out the idea that we *experience* natural beauty as manifested through the properties of a place rather than through those of a single, isolated object.

As in Brennan's eco-humanism, human perception and understanding are at the centre of an environmental-aesthetic model: I do not here address the 'aesthetic' responses of other species. I also avoid discussion of whether or not environmental ethics should be anthropocentric - that would lead to another thesis - but I have no doubt that an aesthetic theory which purports to make nature a subject of study, is itself entirely human-centred. The aesthetic as a non-practical activity is (insofar as we know at this point in time) a question of human perception and value - and the claims for aesthetic perception that I have made rely on a standard set of shared senses - but that doesn't mean that the aesthetic perspective itself is not flexible. Our capacity to change our perspective is one of the great neglected areas of aesthetics, perhaps because art controls our responses more than nature does, by presenting an object within a familiar and conventional medium. In the next section I develop Brennan's idea of emergent properties to defend the use of *all* our senses in the perception of beauty, the beauty of nature's multi-sensuous aesthetic surface.

#### IV. AESTHETIC PROPERTIES AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

##### 1. Language and the Description of Natural Beauty

(i)

In his article 'Values in Nature', environmental ethicist Holmes Rolston III notes that justifying the aesthetic value of nature 'is as difficult as justifying pure science.'<sup>43</sup> Whatever disagreements may have arisen within the discipline of philosophical aesthetics, the indescribability of nature's particular beauty has not been among them. 'Language comes infinitely short of paralleling the variegated surface of nature. Yet words as practical devices are the agencies by which the ineffable diversity of natural existence as it operates in human experience is reduced to orders, ranks, and classes that can be managed.'<sup>44</sup> Perhaps Kant backs away from discussions about the way nature's beauty pleases because he recognises the difficulty in talking about that beauty without lapsing into scientific or practical categories of classification. Paul Valéry thinks that 'common language is ill suited to describing forms',<sup>45</sup> and he is echoed by Mary Mothersill in her observation that 'when it comes to flowers we are botanists at best.'<sup>46</sup> Mothersill adds that our



tradition has not given natural beauty its due and that, unlike Classical Chinese, which marks small but perceptible differences between various bamboo configurations, our vocabulary doesn't make such fine differentiations with reference to nature, perhaps because our descriptive resources are 'clumsy and vague'.<sup>47</sup> Our first task in setting out an approach to natural beauty is to decide how, and what, we are going to talk about in reference to this beauty.

(ii)

One solution to the problem of natural beauty's resistance to language is offered by Adorno, whom I again select as a representative of the continental school of aesthetics. Adorno's ideas take two forms: one fashions a link between nature and art, the other between nature and history. Neither, I feel, is suited to the task of discussing beauty in a way that is true to our experience of it.

Unlike Hegel, Adorno thinks that natural beauty's escape from conceptual formulation is the essence of beauty itself: words bounce off nature like something foreign to it and this 'bouncing off' captures the inadequacy of discursive methods to communicate our sense of beauty generally. The objective strength of natural beauty and the impotence of words in response to it combine 'to demand that the enigma of natural beauty be reflected in art, thereby determining itself in conceptual terms short of outright conceptual definition.'<sup>48</sup> Adorno, as we recall, derides human hubris manifested in the idea of total domination of the world. Here he takes an almost Kantian attitude towards the lack of conceptual control over beauty and yet he sees the art object not as a symbol of human moral dominion but as something which becomes domination-free by 'taking the aesthetic behaviour we display towards nature and transforming it into productive work, which is patterned after material labour.'<sup>49</sup>

Nature as resource or passive object of appreciation is dominated by human interests and concerns but, transformed through art's free expression of beauty in non-practical terms, it becomes more 'natural', i.e., it is free from the domination of human practical interest, the more embodied in art it is. Like Schopenhauer's metaphysical, deficient nature, Adorno's nature is mute and in need of an interpreter. 'Mediate nature, the truth content of art, is false when conceived as immediate nature. While nature's language is mute, art tries to make this muteness speak.'<sup>50</sup> The muteness has less to do with nature and more to do with our inability to 'hear' it 'speak', due to our own practical concerns. Art, however, frees us from those concerns and translates the muteness of freedom into something we can, if only temporarily, understand.

As always Adorno's theory shows great sophistication and imagination in its postulation of a

place for nature in the human political struggle. However, I find his treatment of nature unsatisfactory because it ignores the *sensuous* impact made on us by nature. While nature as a non-specific entity is indeed circumscribed by various political, cultural and even religious systems, as an individual object of our experience (*a natural environment*) it is a distinct phenomenal entity, one with discernably sensuous properties. A child can have an aesthetic experience of nature without comprehending it as inscribed with some political meaning or message. Adorno's theory makes no room for experiences of nature which are almost innocent (though I'm sure he'd consider my own apolitical theory as naively conceived). Before moving on from Adorno to consider another way of talking about nature, I shall pause for a moment to consider his attitude towards nature in relation to cultural contexts generally.

In addition to seeing art as the only adequate expression of nature's freedom, Adorno also thinks nature and history can be appreciated together, through art as an object which dissolves and reconstructs elements of empirical reality.

In natural beauty, as in music, natural and historical elements form ever-changing constellations like the pieces of a kaleidoscope, one thing taking the place of another. It is this kind of fluctuation, rather than some hard and fast relationship among the elements, which gives life to the beautiful in nature. <sup>51</sup>

This approach to nature's beauty is a version of the interdependent position explored in Chapter Three. Adorno believes that nature's unique beauty emerges from our idea of it in relation to an historical context, where history is always being re-interpreted at any given time. There is, of course, no problem with harnessing historical considerations in the appreciation of natural beauty so long as those considerations enhance or modify the sensuous surface - although I doubt that Adorno would subscribe to my view that such considerations should be tethered to the physical object. However, my larger problem with his view here - a view that many people hold in regard to nature, one that stultifies our aesthetic understanding of it - is his insistence that the natural elements of the constellation are somehow *hard and fast* without the intervention of history. As has been suggested through Brennan's account of systemic and climatic factors, the natural environment yields properties which are not hard and fast, but constantly changing. Presenting among themselves ever-new perceptual wholes, they can also be seen as natural encouragement for us to shift our own tired perspectives.

The verse and prose of the Romantic period had a tremendous effect on the way we view nature, guiding us gently into fresh apprehensions and previously ignored aesthetic terrain. Because a direct experience of nature was in fact the fashion for people in Romantic Britain, it is likely that

closer *observation* of the natural environment was in part responsible for the heightening of sensitivity and linguistic facility which occurred around that time. Nature's elements combine and recombine in a manner productive of constantly-changing and beautiful wholes. If we have, at a definite point in our literary past, been shown capable of educating our taste in response to nature, is there good reason to suppose that we cannot educate ourselves again, this time about nature's multi-sensuous aesthetic surface?

Three obstacles stand in our way. The first, currently being eradicated by an increasing respect for environmental philosophy, is our general alienation from natural communities and processes. The second is the difficulty of talking about nature's beauty and, specifically, the strain involved in finding words for the impressions of the 'lower senses', taste, smell and, to a lesser degree, touch. Third, there is the question of whether or not the lower senses are properly aesthetic at all. Wittgenstein, in concert with Kant and Schopenhauer, banishes them to the realm of delight, a place separate from the realm of Art.<sup>52</sup> Can, and should, we talk about the lower senses? I think we must: they are clearly part of our experience of the natural environment and often contribute greatly to the overall impression of 'place'.

## 2. The Neglected Senses: Another View

### (i)

There are several types of objection against incorporating the lower senses into our estimation of beauty, natural or otherwise, but it is worth noting at the outset that the bias towards the visual and the aural in aesthetics is so strong that *aesthetic* itself is associated with the impressions of these senses. This may be because, as Kant and Schopenhauer would agree, sight and hearing are the vehicles of language and organised understanding, and art itself evolves from these. Kant of course also wishes to distinguish the sensuously pleasing from the aesthetically pleasing, but so do I. There is a difference between enjoying a cool stream around your ankles because you are hot, and enjoying that stream in the context of its sight, sound and smell as well: the latter doesn't seek the quieting of personal appetite, but gives pleasure in the apprehension of it - tactile and olfactory as well as visual.

Some thinkers, Kant included, justify our rejection of the lower senses in aesthetics by citing wide variations in sensitivity among different human beings. As Russell observes, the knowledge of the senses 'distorts as much as it reveals'.<sup>53</sup> Yet, aesthetic judgements do not seek to establish the same kind of stable knowledge as scientific judgements, so it is not clear that minor variations in human sense-perception matter all that much to aesthetics. Of course, while perceiving a space

with all our senses, we tend to emphasise different aspects of our experience by filtering out unneeded or unwanted impressions (a firefighter will try to locate fire through their nose when smoke blinds their sight; a chef uses the tongue and not the eye in a decision to add another sprig of parsley to the soup). Still, we are as a species united by the possession (except in specific circumstances) of five senses. 'We risk losing sight of the fact that however diverse our perceptions of environment, as members of the same species we are constrained to see things a certain way. All human beings share common perception, a common world, by virtue of possessing similar organs.'<sup>54</sup> Even those of us whose senses are in some way impaired nevertheless 'perceive' the world in a manner characteristic of human beings: multi-sensuously through identifiably similar sense organs.

(ii)

Other thinkers who reject the relevance of the lower senses to aesthetic perception claim that patterns of sight and hearing are affected by language and persuasion. Hearing and sight (and to some degree touch) give impressions composed of parts and these lend visual and aural objects a complexity not found in smells or tastes. Furthermore, smells and tastes cannot represent anything. They lack the expressive or communicative aspect of aesthetic experience found in the arts or metaphorically in visually-evocative landscapes.

This view, not unlike that of Kant, contains two weaknesses. First of all, the power to represent or communicate in an ideo-sensory fashion is not a *necessary* aspect of the aesthetic object. One aspect, yes, but not a defining aspect, as has been argued elsewhere in this thesis. Second, if the object of our perception is not a smell or taste, then there is no reason that smells and tastes cannot be components of a more complex aesthetic whole - something like a natural environment. Yet, 'it would be a very determined esoteric theorist indeed who should deny that the fragrance of roses or gardens or orchards or perfumes was not merely no part of their visual beauty, but no part of their beauty at all'.<sup>55</sup> D.W. Prall inveighs against the aesthetic theory that takes as its model the impressions given by art, noting that *nature* contains objects of multi-sensuous surfaces and is itself a multi-sensuous surface. Just because we cannot as yet create art objects which make successful blends of sense impressions, 'we need not foist our limitations upon nature'.<sup>56</sup>

Nature has no prejudice against what Prall calls 'elementary aesthetic materials'; it is human limitation that fails to recognise the integral role of these materials in making nature 'so transcendently beautiful'.<sup>57</sup> Sense impressions interact to create the aesthetic properties found within any specific natural environment. I might call a forest autumnal and point in defence of my



qualitative claim to, among other things, the smell of dried leaves embedded in soil, their crisp and fragile texture in the hand. The leaves are crisp, dank, brightly-coloured - the *place* has the property of seasonal decay, the quality of being autumnal.

(iii)

Even if we admit that the lower senses are interactive with other senses in offering composite impressions of natural beauty, we must still ask if the impressions of the elementary senses - smells and tastes - can themselves be beautiful. Francis Coleman takes up this issue in his paper 'Can a Smell or a Taste or a Touch Be Beautiful', asserting immediately that there is no logical contradiction between elements like beauty and odour, as there is between square and circle.<sup>58</sup> I would also add that my conception of beauty, functioning as a standing concept and pleasing in the apprehension of the individual object, is flexible enough to accommodate the impressions of the lower senses so long as they are not in prior service to practical reason or appetite (if the garlic mushrooms smell good because I'm hungry, then my impression is most likely devoid of aesthetic content). We tend to forget that even the 'aesthetic' senses can be utilised for practical purposes and that they are as much subject to interested distraction as those of smell and taste.

In the right frame of mind, in the right conditions, the impressions of the nostril or the palate can be no less purely aesthetic, than those of eye or ear - the scent or taste is appreciated for its own sake, in the mere apprehension of it. Coleman offers a catalogue of reasons why the lower senses can function aesthetically - the blind person appreciating a face or a piece of silk, the smell of a delicate perfume - claiming that objects don't need to make 'demands' on us to be aesthetic, nor do we *infer* the beauty of elementary sense impressions when we do come across them. A colour, a smell, a taste, a texture, *is found to be* a thing of beauty in its own right.

Coleman's only error, as I see it, is to assume that there is a correlation between the beauty of composite parts and the beauty of the whole in which they are embedded.

[I]t is clear that if we deny the possibility of beautiful smells and tactual sensations, then it would be inappropriate to refer to such data or aggregates of such data in an aesthetic judgement.<sup>59</sup>

We recall from Brennan that the properties of a whole are not simply the properties of its constituent parts melded together. In this way a place may be beautiful without each of its parts - or even each particularly aesthetic property - being beautiful. Furthermore, Coleman here comes close to a logical fallacy, that of division: the individual parts making up a whole do not each necessarily possess the properties of that whole. A group of talented but individually

undistinguished football players can work together to make a great team. Similarly, the opposite claim is also fallacious (that a whole bears the properties of its parts): a composition of beautiful parts doesn't necessarily make a beautiful whole (or a team of expert strikers a World Cup side). So, even if single smells or tastes are themselves controversial aesthetic objects, their status in this way does not affect their ability to form a part, and even a crucial part, of nature's environmental beauty. Think of sitting under a pine tree in snow: the entire impression might be beautiful without the snow or the needles or the smell themselves being singularly outstanding.

### 3. The Multi-sensuous Environment and the Human Scale

#### (i)

In Chapter Five I quoted Yuriko Saito as saying that the various sensory qualities of the natural environment combine to give us a unique sense of place.<sup>60</sup> Taken hand in hand with Brennan's what-where function, the sense of place can be characterised as the way we relate to the kind of beauty which is specifically natural. In one way natural places are like architectural objects, centring and ordering our perceptions in an extended way. Yet, architecture has a sense of permanence that natural environments lack: despite the solid presence of mountains and boulders, the weather, flora and fauna are in a constant state of flux, presenting a unique challenge to aesthetic theory. If buildings are the positional centre of our aesthetic experience of architecture, what are the positional centres of beautiful natural environments? Nature isn't 'organised' around a specific theme or edifice as art or architecture is: while we can go to the top of a building or lie dormant on its basement floor, our experience of the building is ultimately determined by the structure itself. Nature has ordering principles by the dozens but none that takes aesthetic precedence in perception.

Does this mean that we can go from the extreme of microscopic analysis to the heights of space travel and still say that our appreciation is directed towards, or in response to, natural beauty? Kant's sublime pleasure occurs in part because imagination, or perception, cannot keep pace with reason's understanding of infinity. I reject what Crowther calls Kant's baroque sublime, but Kant's, and Schopenhauer's, account of the sublime as growing out of a relationship between the human being *qua* creature and its natural habitat, provides us with a good point of departure in seeking a positional centre for natural beauty. While plane travel yields wondrous views, we relate to the earth differently in that context than we do when hillwalking near a lake. Similarly, a section of bird feather under the microscope reveals fascinating patterns, but the way of taking in these patterns differs from the way we'd encounter the feathers of birds in a natural, unaided, multi-sensuous context. Each of these contexts yields aesthetic experiences, but their character as

*being inspired by nature* is not always perceptually clear. Therefore, in order to glean from the natural environment the fullest aesthetic experience possible, I suggest that the human person, with senses, faculties and physical abilities intact, ought to serve as the positional or aesthetic centre within the natural environment.

(ii)

Sparshott advocates a 'self-to-setting' model of aesthetic appreciation of nature because he feels that the sentient human being placed in a natural context is able to discern relationships that are more environmental in character, than if the person perceived nature from a plane, under the microscope or as similar to a painterly landscape.<sup>61</sup> I agree with Sparshott's choice of approach. In conjunction with Brennan's eco-humanism, the human individual in a natural setting both acknowledges their own kinship with the natural environment by meeting it as a natural creature and employs a flexibility of perception enabled by one's freedom of mobility within or at a given place. We don't need to go naked but it helps to be as free as possible from the burden of artificial constraints: shoes are often necessary but the feel of grass underfoot can be part of the experience. This means that one takes in more than views. One takes in textures, sounds, smells, and, from many different perspectives, a series of relational objects rather than fixed landmarks. Contrary to the conventional idea of aesthetic distance, aesthetic appreciation of nature requires engagement - not of a practical or utilitarian kind but one of direct, sensuous involvement with nature's variegated surface.

P.T. Newby calls that sense of being in and surrounded by nature its 'enveloping quality'.<sup>62</sup> While grand buildings or monuments may also have this affect, they lack the multi-sensuous texture of the natural environment, and its direct relation to the changes of climate and light (think of a flower's behaviour in bright sunlight and then later in the afternoon, or the way leaves turn over in the wind before a storm, or the yellow-green omen of a pre-tornado sky). The human scale is important to this kind of appreciation of nature, and while I don't disagree that there are other approaches, I believe that this one yields the most complex and multifarious aesthetic properties. We gain something through the telescope or the plane but we lose something too - the ability to hear or touch or smell that which we see. The child on the ground, watching the ants at work on their hill, has a better sense of the self-to-setting character of our appreciation of nature than the most refined and well-informed coach traveller. Models of appreciation taken from art - models which limit our perception to single senses or limited perceptual positions (it's not considered appropriate to get up and sit on stage to get a different perspective on the opera) - ignore the range of properties, relations and responses that are possible when the human scale is employed in all its flexibility.

The widespread mining of art and literature as a means of defining landscape experience tends to emphasise a tradition of the detached aesthetic. It plays down other components of direct experience such as tactile sensation of surface, motion and exertion, weather, social contact and 'unaesthetic' preoccupations of mood and thought. It ignores man's versatility and his capacity to react totally differently to phenomena presented under similar conditions according to his intentions, preoccupations and current activities<sup>63</sup>

If I've recently taken up rock climbing, I may use my new skills to ascend a craggy hillside, gathering new impressions along the way. Perhaps my sense of the hillside will alter from this new perspective, now that I can feel its texture as well as perceive it visually. The stone may shine a different colour from my rather vertical position and perhaps a new kind of loneliness pervades the hill as the sound of wind gets caught in rock crevices, bounding back to my closely-directed ears. Standing at the foot of a hill, going up, sitting atop it - each yields a new and different sense of place; maybe different places, or facets of one place. In any case, the limits are those of our physical capabilities and imagination in the employment of them: each sense has its own horizon and so 'place' can be defined quite easily by the limits of sense at any given time. Maybe some perspectives are better than others and I will offer a claim of beauty for a particular perspective on a place, inviting others to share my 'vision' of it and articulating my reasons for my preference through pointing to aesthetic properties. Systemic changes furnish infinite possibilities for new visions, new textures, new sounds. This is both an asset and a problem.

The *changeability* of any given natural environment makes judgement of it of limited temporal applicability, because the next time one goes there, one has a relationally different perceptual object. This means that no judgement about a place has permanent validity - we must always be ready to modify our judgements when conditions change, and alter the sensuous surface. Ben Nevis in late-afternoon springtime is not Ben Nevis in a blinding gale. Yet, this means that the natural environment will forever yield new aesthetic objects, if only our perceptual abilities are flexible enough to apprehend it in all its variety.

(iii)

Geographer Jay Appleton claims that nature's *actuality* is its greatest strength and weakness in aesthetic perception: weakness, because we can not do away with certain obstacles in a place; strength, because we can appreciate it at many levels and from many perspectives. Yet, I want to argue that it is not the ontological actuality that matters in the aesthetic appreciation of nature but the perceived actuality - the properties that indicate that we are in the presence of a living and self-driving system. Of course, all aesthetic objects, be they of nature or of art, enter an 'unreal' dimension in aesthetic appreciation, where 'unreal' means devoid of functional, practical or



teleological ends. Its unreality is not that of a figment - after all, the unique character of an *aesthetic* object is that it is experientially present - but rather that of an object deployed for no 'purpose', displaying Kant's purposiveness without purpose. All 'real' or useful objects have aesthetic possibility because they contain perceptual information which we can apprehend directly, but only when that information is appreciated for its own sake - when properties are seen in relation and those relations are the object of attention - is the aesthetic possibility realised.

So, when a natural environment is appreciated for its agricultural versatility, the geographic location is the same as that for an appreciation which is aesthetic, but the *object* is not, because an object is defined by its relations and the relations of an environment as a farm will differ from the relations of an environment as a thing of beauty. Nature as *actual* is a perceptual rather than a conceptual consideration. By actual we mean that which is seen to be independent of human interest, that with a guiding force of its own. This doesn't mean that it cannot be harnessed for human purposes - it often is - but simply that, perceived free of such harnessing, the living communities of nature will go on without us.

Constraints also apply to art. Art is *not* 'real' insofar as it fails to serve as a means to some end, or fails to have a function or use which is pragmatic. We tend to think of art as defined by having no purpose other than its own being. However, it would be naive to assume that art objects are not 'used' for financial or social purposes: art can be utilised as easily as nature. In both cases, the sincerity of perceptual focus determines whether or not the appreciation is truly aesthetic - not whether the object is actual, artificial or useful in ordinary circumstances. In other words, it is the perceptual character of an object that determines its aesthetic status, not its genesis, ordinary connotations or place in human creative activity. Consider the difference between rain as a meteorological nuisance - it's pouring and we haven't got an umbrella - and the same thing seen aesthetically, as 'jets of rainwater, broken off by the wind, spouted all but horizontally as if from firehoses. pricking and cutting...like thousands of pins and needles.' <sup>64</sup>

Our difficulty is not so much the required shift away from practicality towards the aesthetic - most of understand this shift in principle - but the way to describe nature's particular beauty in terms that enhance our perception of it. Descriptions of nature's beauty and the judgements they sometimes support have, as mentioned, a limited temporal application: the claim that the grand Canyon is beautiful is often made but can only ever be accepted provisionally, since the grand Canyon (unlike the Mona Lisa) is really an infinite series of particulars, each of which needs to be judged on its own.

Still, the lack of permanence of aesthetic judgements with regard to nature shouldn't prevent

us from making them, for two reasons. One, limited judgements can be taken as subject to re-inspection of the place described and modification of the claim if necessary. After all, our aim is not to erect judgements in stone but to increase possibilities for aesthetic pleasure, that uniquely human kind of experience. A place may prove to be beautiful under a variety of conditions and hence we say with some certainty that 'this place is beautiful', implying in such a claim that it stands the test of changes and time. However, judgements can be tested only in perception, and it is always a possibility that a once-beautiful place will alter so drastically as to no longer be pleasing in apprehension. This doesn't mean that we can't direct others, through our claims of beauty, to places that have yielded beauty in the past, understanding all the while that in any particular set of conditions our claim may no longer apply.

Two, judgements about nature made 'on the spot' have great pedagogical potential, and it is in the work of educators and other teachers that a serious aesthetic of the environment will find its place (should we disparage the sunset over the sea because it lasts only two minutes?). Despite lacking the feedback dimension of aesthetic criticism, criticism in reference to the natural environment is a practice of eloquent pointing, of discerning, citing and articulating the significance of relations in perception. It's relevance to a 'here and now' context of experience shouldn't lessen its impact - and, as mentioned above, we can make conditional judgements based on past experiences - but rather increase our opportunities to enhance our aesthetic understanding in an immediate and accessible manner. Consider the encouragement given us by nature-writer Barry Lopez in his book *Crossing Open Ground*.

If you walk up, say, a dry arroyo in the Sonoran Desert you will feel a mounding and rolling of sand and silt beneath your foot that is distinctive. You will anticipate the crumbling of the sedimentary earth in the arroyo bank as your hand reaches out, and in the tangible evidence you will sense a history of water in the region. Perhaps a black-throated sparrow lands in a paloverde bush - the resiliency of the twig under the bird, that precise shade of yellowish green against the milk-blue sky, the fluttering whir of the arriving sparrow...draw on the smell of the creosote bush, or clack stones together in the dry air. Feel how light is the desiccated dropping of the kangaroo rat. Study an animal track obscured by the wind. these are all elements of the land, and what makes the landscape comprehensible are the relationships between them. One learns a landscape finally not by knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationships in it - like that between the sparrow and the twig. <sup>65</sup>

Lopez tells us that aesthetic claims should be about making clear the relationships found 'at the edge of one's senses - the high note of the winter wren, the thick perfume of propolis that drifts downwind from spring willows, the brightness of woodchips scattered by beaver - that all this fits together'. <sup>66</sup> Like Brennan's theory of eco-humanism, an environmental aesthetic emphasises the

relational character of nature's unique properties, articulating those properties as aspects of an individual whole. Even if our judgements about nature don't apply in all temporal instances of a geographic place, they have great impact both when they are uttered and when they are offered retrospectively as a guide for others. Such claims for beauty made on behalf of natural environments can be defended by reference to the relations found within that environment - relations between more and less fleeting elements, relations not adequately represented in aesthetic theories generated from art history or science. In the next chapter I shall attempt to show why the art history and science models of appreciation are not suitable to the kind of environmental aesthetic experience I have presented. In closing support of my approach, I again offer the words of Lopez, from his essay on teaching children about natural beauty, 'Children in the Woods'.

The quickest door to open in the woods for a child is the one that leads to the smallest room, by knowing the name each thing is called. The door that leads to the cathedral is marked by a hesitancy to speak at all, rather to encourage by examples a sharpness of the senses. If one speaks it should only be to say, how wonderfully this all fits together, to indicate what a long, fierce peace can be derived from this knowledge. <sup>67</sup>

## NOTES - CHAPTER EIGHT

- 1 Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 67.
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- 3 Ibid., p.200.
- 4 Margaret MacDonald, 'Arguments Used in the Criticism of the Arts', p. 121.
- 5 T.E. Jessop, 'The Objectivity of Aesthetic Value' in John Hospers (ed.) *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics* (The free press, 1969), p. 275.
- 6 Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, p. 85.
- 7 E.M. Bartlett, *Types of Aesthetic Judgement* (George Allen and Unwin, 1937), pp. 90-92.
- 8 Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 215.
- 9 Mothersill, p. 272.
- 10 T.J. Diffey, 'Natural Beauty Without Metaphysics' in Salim Kemal (ed.) *Nature, Landscape and Art*, p. 26.
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- 14 Ibid., p. 107.
- 15 Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Basic Issues in Aesthetics*, p.139.
- 16 Guy Sircello, *A New Theory of Beauty* (Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 4.
- 17 Francis Sparshott, 'Figuring the Ground: Notes on Some Theoretical Problems of the Aesthetic Environment' *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 6: 11-23, 1972, p. 23.
- 18 Paul Valéry, 'Man and the Sea-Shell', p. 4.
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- 22 Yi -Fu Tuan, *Topophilia : A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (Prentice Hall, 1974), p. 95.
- 23 Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (The Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 128.
- 24 Adorno, p. 102.
- 25 Sparshott, p. 16.
- 26 Andrew Brennan, *Thinking about Nature*(Routledge, 1988), p. 91.
- 27 Henrietta Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology* (Polity Press, 1988), p. 20.
- 28 David and Eileen Spring (eds.), *Ecology, Religion and History* (Harper and Row, 1974).
- 29 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* , p. 108.
- 30 Burke has a wonderfully frank little passage on the *results* of forgetting our natural needs in his *Enquiry* . He chastises scholars for being physically inert, claiming that 'Providence has so ordered it, that a state of inaction, however it may flatter our indolence, should be productive of many inconveniences.' (p. 134) He then goes on to discuss the need for a diet of fiber and a lessening of physical inaction if life is to be free of 'inconveniences'.
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- 33 Adorno, p. 100.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 103-104.
- 35 Ibid., p. 98.
- 36 T.L.S. Sprigge, 'Are There Intrinsic Values in Nature?' *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 4(1): 21-28, 1987, p. 27.
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- 45 Paul Valery, 'Man and the Sea Shell', p. 9.
- 46 Mothersill, p. 165.
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- 52 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*, p. 11.
- 53 Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, p. 93.
- 54 Tuan, p. 5.
- 55 D.W. Prall, 'Aesthetic Surface' in John Hospers, *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*, p. 51.
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- 59 Ibid., p. 319
- 60 Yuriko Saito, 'Is there a Correct Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature?', p. 42.
- 61 Sparshott, p. 13.
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- 64 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground* and *The Double* trans. Jessie Coulson (Penguin Books, 1981), p. 165.
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## CHAPTER NINE

### EXAMINING THE ART AND SCIENCE MODELS OF APPRECIATION

#### I. THE APPEARANCE OF ART: HEGEL'S LEGACY

##### 1. The Beauty of Spirit

###### (i)

The tendency to privilege art over nature in philosophical aesthetics, and the assertion that aesthetic theory does, or should, issue from questions about art, is largely the result of Hegel's influence. Hegel gives two major reasons for preferring art to nature in his system, the first of which is art's lack of practical use.

[I]n portraying such living realities, art entirely alters our attitude to them because it cuts away all the *practical* ramifications which otherwise connect us with the things of the world, and brings them to us in an entirely *contemplative* way; and it also cancels all our indifference to them (i.e., in the case where they have no relation to our practical interests) and leads our notice, preoccupied otherwise, entirely to the situation portrayed...<sup>1</sup>

The art object possesses what Mikel Dufrenne calls a 'radical exteriority', which by virtue of its uselessness directs our senses to its sensuousness and exists beyond the realm of our practical interests.<sup>2</sup> The question of whether or not critical activity can take place with respect to anything other than the art object, which lacks the connotations of usefulness, is often raised by those who think aesthetics is paradigmatically practised in relation to art. Art, they say, *invites* aesthetic assessment, and nature, when seen as aesthetic, is really just being adopted as an aesthetic object in the use-less manner of art. Art has no obvious function (its immersion in the commercial sphere notwithstanding) other than to invite our aesthetic appreciation. Unlike Kant, who thinks that nature is the paradigmatic object for judgement because it is not made to please, Hegel and his disciples see art as being above the concept of 'resource' that we associate with nature. Art brings elements which are already in existence into new conjunctions; it serves no purpose and calls attention primarily to itself.

I agree that art does bring elements into new conjunctions but it is, again, naive to think that in our day art no longer serves a practical purpose. It is true that artworks in the genuine sense are conceived as objects for their own sakes, but the commercial institution surrounding much of what

is called fine art today exerts a strong influence on what kinds of things are actually produced. While I won't deny that art in the basic sense corresponds to Hegel's idea of the useless object, it is nevertheless prone, in its current context, to obeying the market forces driving the fine art business. In reality, art has often served purposes other than its own presentation: the king must be pleased, the altar must have items to prompt veneration. Art's *aesthetic* dimension intersects, but is not limited to, the institutions in which art is embedded. Neither is nature's aesthetic dimension circumscribed by its function as a resource for use.

Kant's free and dependent beauty distinction comes in handy here: as argued in the first chapter of the thesis, it is not the ontological status of the object that determines its aesthetic purity but rather the attitude we bring towards it. This means not only that natural objects can just as easily be analysed in respect of their ends or functions, as art objects, but that art objects can be seen as practical resources as readily as natural objects. So, if art is somehow paradigmatic in aesthetic theory, i.e., if theory about nature is derivative of theory about art, then this is not due to art's supposed purity or uselessness in comparison to nature.

(ii)

Hegel's second reason for privileging art over nature is art's position in the hierarchy of things spiritualised, or touched by human influence. The beauty of art is *higher* than that of nature.

[S]pirit alone is the *true*, comprehending everything in itself, so that everything beautiful is truly beautiful only as sharing in this higher sphere and generated by it. In this sense the beauty of nature appears only as a reflection of the beauty that belongs to spirit, as an imperfect incomplete mode (of beauty), a mode which in its *substance* is contained in the spirit itself.<sup>3</sup>

Hegel treats natural objects and scenes perfunctorily and when he does mention them 'he is consistent in saying that they are regarded as beautiful if they appear to express something human, by exciting our interest or awakening some feeling.'<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is not only art's pleasing appearance as *material* that Hegel stresses, but material fused with spirit or human understanding. Art thus has a cognitive dimension in Hegel's philosophy - a dimension not dissimilar to the *communicative* aspect of art acknowledged by Kant and Schopenhauer.

However, it is not clear that art's cognitive or communicative dimension makes it superior to natural beauty, nor does that cognitive dimension stand out clearly as the inspiration for aesthetic theory. After all, the environmental, variegated and multi-sensuous surface of nature presents properties in a unique way not mastered by art - but this does not mean that nature should be the



paradigmatic object for aesthetic judgement. Rather, art and nature are both judged in virtue of their properties. It so happens that the character of the *relations* between properties differs quite radically in each, in addition to the different sorts of properties involved (art's properties can be ideo-sensory, with ideas embodied in the aesthetic material; nature's properties engage the senses more fully and act in more multi-sensuous concert). It seems that the cognitive dimension of art differentiates it from nature but that this differentiation need not result in the automatic demotion of things natural. Hegel of course focuses on art's 'spiritual' or cognitive aspect because (like Kant) it furthers his metaphysical vision. However, 'without any commitment to an idealist metaphysics, philosophers continue to speak of natural beauty in a curiously *condescending* tone.'<sup>5</sup>

As Burke says, 'there is in mankind an unfortunate propensity to make themselves, their views, and their works, the measure of excellence in everything whatsoever.'<sup>6</sup> Doubtless this is true, as I have suggested in the previous two chapters. We take our capacity for rationality and language and erect that capacity as a standard even when that standard is inappropriate (hence Adorno's aversion to judgement of beauty, Sibley's aversion to verdicts). In this way we would be wiser, in approaching the topic of the aesthetic domain, to heed the observations of Bertrand Russell.

[G]reatness of soul is not fostered by those philosophies which assimilate the universe to man. Knowledge is a form of union of Self and not-Self; like all union, it is impaired by dominion, and therefore by any attempt to force the universe into conformity with what we find in ourselves. There is a widespread philosophical tendency towards the view which tells us that man is the measure of all things...This view...in addition to being untrue...has the effect of robbing philosophic contemplation of all that gives it value, since it fetters contemplation to self. What it calls knowledge is not a union with the not-self, but a set of prejudices, habits and desires, making an impenetrable veil between us and the world beyond.<sup>7</sup>

By extending aesthetic analysis that is specifically appropriate to art, to nature as well, we miss seeing or experiencing aspects of the natural environment which are aesthetically unique, thus truncating our knowledge of the world in general. In the previous chapter I claimed that the *aesthetic* concerns, insofar as we practise aesthetics, the human being only; but this does not mean that the objects known by us are themselves infused with human characteristics in all instances of beauty.

The view that sees nature's beauty after an analogy with art, an analogy based in human cognitive capabilities, is one which necessarily distorts the range of aesthetic experiences available to us. Hegel has metaphysical reasons for promoting the aesthetic superiority of art; contemporary thinkers do not, though many of them continue to acknowledge nature only as it takes on, or

reflects, the aesthetic attributes of art. Gadamer claims that 'a deeper analysis of the aesthetic experience of natural beauty teaches us that, in a certain sense, this is an illusion and that in fact we can only see nature with the eyes of men experienced and educated in art.'<sup>8</sup> Immediately we are moved to ask, 'But what of Wordsworth's sensitive country dweller? What of those who have no access to fine art or education? Do they see no beauty in their countryside, their habitat?' How do those who think nature is seen only after art defend their views, and what threat are these views, if any, to a genuine aesthetic assessment of the natural environment?

## 2. The Beauty of Mind

### (i)

Samuel Alexander, like Gadamer after him, thinks that nature is beautiful only if we convert it into works of art. He even goes so far as to claim that a thunderstorm appeals aesthetically as it approaches the condition of a painted storm,<sup>9</sup> though how one paints the majesty of thunderclaps is beyond me. Alexander instructs us to seek why art is beautiful if we wish to know why nature is so, because art is that which is constructed by human beings, and 'the beautiful is the object (and perhaps we may even add, the satisfaction) of the constructive impulse when that impulse has become contemplative instead of practical.'<sup>10</sup> Accusing Kant of ignoring the constructive impulse at the heart of the aesthetic, Alexander (like Valéry) thinks that *all* beauty reflects the human desire to create, to make. The 'artistic' mind of human beings tries to 'recognise' traces of itself in the world, whether literally in works of art or metaphorically in nature .

Schopenhauer, we recall, unites appreciation and execution in genius, not always distinguishing between the exercise of one skill and the other. In this way the appreciation of beauty might be seen as existing on a continuum with the making of art. After all, both artist and appreciator discern and contemplate aesthetic relations for their own sakes. However, just because we 'remake' the aesthetic object in our minds whenever it is apprehended - the object *qua* aesthetic object is not encountered thoughtlessly but is considered, perhaps articulated, in virtue of its specifically perceptual and intelligible relations - doesn't mean that the *beauty* of nature is qualitatively derivative of that of art. There is a difference between the acknowledgement of human creativity in passive contemplation (it takes focus and imagination to recognise and articulate, even to ourselves, the aesthetic relations present in an object) , and the assertion that nature pleases after the *manner* of art. The latter not only assumes an acquaintance with some kind of art; it deletes from consciousness those multi-sensuous and environmental aspects of nature that make it so fresh in perception.

Also, only a critic would demean the skill of the artist by supposing that artistic activity was essentially the same as critical activity. The ignorance displayed in failing to see skill as a physical and mental capability quite separate from that of creative vision, is yet another weakness of the theory that reduces the appreciation of nature to the appreciation of our own constructive impulse. Alexander and Gadamer believe that nature pleases after art because art reflects our powers of creative execution, our own powers being what we appreciate most. However, nature pleases in ways that cannot be assimilated to human skill (the force of wind, the dew on morning grass), and human skill itself is too complex to be equated with critical activity.

(ii)

Another approach to art's aesthetic superiority over nature concerns art's cognitive or communicative dimension. As discussed in various places throughout the thesis, art can possess properties which themselves communicate, either alone or in relation with other properties. It is important, too, to understand that some art works do not achieve beauty but still manage to communicate effectively in perception. At times the communication will be just as effectively accomplished through discursive prose :a badly-executed or melodramatic painting depicting the plight of unemployed factory workers is perhaps less effective in raising the consciousness of its audience than would be a tersely-written, clearly-delivered speech on the same topic. However, sometimes an artwork lacks beauty - may in fact be unconcerned with sensuous or intelligible pleasure - but is a milestone in the history of art anyway.

Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes have nothing on the steel wool pads we buy in boxes for the kitchen, but assembled as an artwork Warhol's boxes 'comment' on the relation between art, popular culture and commercialism in a way that was new at the time. They depend on your knowledge of Brillo pads and also the world of galleries and museums, in order to understand the 'message'. Such a work might not strike us as beautiful in perception - not even in the way it communicates about its topic - but it was nevertheless innovative at the time, and art focuses on innovation as much as on aesthetic impact. For this reason, a work of art might not be beautiful (remember: beauty is a standing concept) but it might still be a seminal work of art insofar as it innovates or is chosen as such. And, beauty might not be art: nature can please aesthetically without for a moment being mistaken or imagined as an artificial construct. B.R. Tilghman suggests that aesthetic appreciation occurs in response to the properties presented by an object, but that art can have a cultural importance that is not limited to or even defined by such properties. He admits that art and the aesthetic do often intertwine but concludes that 'it is enough to note that we can often be involved with the aesthetics of something without concern for the importance or greater significance of the thing.' <sup>11</sup>

I do not dispute art's capacity to communicate, and incur cultural significance, in a way that nature cannot. What I query is our approach to the relationship between art, aesthetics and culture. Some thinkers maintain that the aesthetic is one thing and cultural importance another. Others see cultural importance or recognition as *determining* what is aesthetic in the first place: works or objects are publicly enfranchised as belonging to the category of aesthetic significance. My approach to the relationship between art, culture and the aesthetic conforms to neither of these other views. I see aesthetic properties (special perceptual features) as central to any conception of aesthetic practice, but I also acknowledge that the character of art's properties differs from that of nature's, so that, while beauty is always assessed in terms of relations between properties, those relations differ markedly in natural and artistic contexts. The aesthetic isn't necessarily divorced from culture, or a mode of appreciation differing from it: art can harness culture in its properties and relations, such that art's properties have cultural content as well as significance, a content that is perceptually or intelligibly discernible.

My approach, I believe, makes progress in resolving two nagging difficulties at the heart of aesthetics. One, the continuity of beauty and aesthetic appreciation between art and nature is preserved without any sacrifice of complexity on either side. Two, art is shown to be an inappropriate *paradigm* for all beauty, that of nature included, because the assessment of nature involves properties of a living or geological or meteorological sort, and art-theory cannot account for them. Rather than making art the paradigm for beauty, we can make beauty in virtue of properties the starting point, encircling the diverse properties attaching to diverse objects along the way. Nothing is sacrificed - art retains its communicative ability, nature its environmental multi-sensuousness - and there is much to be gained by extending the appreciative realm once again beyond that derived from an echo of our own capacities.

## II. THE AESTHETIC DOMAIN

### 1. Art as Definitive of Aesthetic Experience: More Problems

(i)

There are, of course, fairly well known objections to approaches, like my own, which make art and nature topics within a more general aesthetics concerned with beauty. Few people would today take nature as the primary aesthetic object, as many theistically-oriented philosophers did in the eighteenth century. However, most go further than a simple denial of nature's primacy in their



assertions about the role of art in aesthetics. Not only is art not inferior to nature as an aesthetic object; art theory itself is not a branch of aesthetic theory but something altogether more comprehensive and complex.<sup>12</sup> I do not disagree with this: the fact that art communicates and harnesses cultural concerns, and does so in an historical way, necessitates that art be studied as a human endeavour and institution in its own right, and not just on aesthetic grounds (art history is hardly about what makes objects beautiful, though analyses of beauty might be a component of art-historical discourse). Still, the distinctness of art history and even some art criticism, from the practice of aesthetics, has been taken a step further, where (as mentioned in the last section) the cultural activity of art criticism begins to define and circumscribe the aesthetic.

A serious distortion is introduced into many accounts of the aesthetic attitude by taking as central to it cases which are really peripheral or secondary, that is, cases where what we regard as a work of art is, in point of fact, a piece of uncontrived nature. Kant, for instance, asks us to consider a rose that is contemplated as beautiful...<sup>13</sup>

In this passage Richard Wollheim asserts that beauty as an aesthetic predicate is first derived from our awareness and appreciation of art, and that art is central to aesthetic understanding. He compares the use of nature as a central aesthetic case, to expressing and explicating our understanding of language by explaining the experience of hearing a parrot 'talking'. His central case is an art that we *know* to be produced as art, one which inspires a correspondence between the mind of the spectator and the mind of the artist. '[O]nce the aesthetic attitude has been established on the basis of objects produced under the concept of art, we can then extend it beyond this base.'<sup>14</sup> In other words, to find an object beautiful is to see it as if it were a work of art, where the concept of art *determines* the kind of relations inherent in beauty. For Wollheim, the idea of *production* is the focus of our aesthetic appreciation, a production that we recognise and acknowledge.

I agree that we often do recognise an object as being produced, and that the properties it has as a result of this communicate in an interesting and aesthetic way, but I do not understand the need for philosophers like Wollheim to make art central to one's aesthetic consciousness. I have already raised several objections against the predication of aesthetic judgement on causal genesis; here I would add that the aesthetic experiences of children or those who have always lived in the country can be as informed and powerful as those who have an experience of 'art' as a concept. If I have never been to a museum but am well acquainted with the nuances of the mountain in back of my house, must my appreciation of the mountain be in some way derivative of the impulse to decorate, produce or create? It seems to me that beauty pleases where it does, no matter what its source, and that the manner of that pleasure is too multifarious in general to parcel it off into conceptual boxes called art. Consider, in contrast to Wollheim, the opinion of German physicist Gert Eilenberger.

Why is it that the silhouette of a storm-bent leafless tree against an evening sky in winter is perceived as beautiful, but the corresponding silhouette of any multi-purpose building is not, in spite of all efforts of the architect? The answer seems to me, even if somewhat speculative, to follow from the new insight into dynamical systems. Our feeling for beauty is inspired by the harmonious arrangement of order and disorder as it occurs in natural objects - in clouds, trees, mountain ranges or snow crystals.<sup>15</sup>

It would be possible to assemble a panel of art critics, philosophers, scientists, artists and other ordinary folk around a table, in order to ask each of them what they take as central to their concept of beauty. Some would say nature, others art; some maybe neither or both. Having examined a good sample of works in philosophical aesthetics in search of the answer, I have come to the conclusion that discussion of the primordality of art or nature is pretty much futile. I shall press on with my analysis of how we encounter beauty at all, with the hope of showing that art's properties, while differing from those of nature, nevertheless exist on an aesthetic continuum with them.

(ii)

Continental philosophers often talk about the work of art 'speaking' to us, meaning that we recognise our own species traits in art, our mode of communication. Monroe Beardsley isolates the signs of human presence in art as 'human qualities' and sees such qualities as an integral part of whatever beauty we may find. For this reason Beardsley concentrates on art objects, where human qualities can safely be found, and while he acknowledges that some people think the aesthetic point of view can be taken up towards almost anything, he refers to those people as 'aesthetic athletes'.<sup>16</sup> Like Wollheim, Beardsley is disposed to talk about objects which promote a correspondence between the mind of the artist and the mind of the appreciator: art's properties reflect our inner, cognitive, emotional life.

It is true that art's properties do express or invoke our inner life and that this is one of the unique strengths of art in aesthetic appreciation. However, while the properties of art engage us as thinking, maybe even creative beings (I'm not ruling out some degree of identification between critic and artist, however small), the properties of *nature* engage us as sensing, environmentally-evolved beings. The tendency of aesthetic theory to neglect one aspect of our being in favour of the other supports Andrew Brennan's thesis that we have ignored and become alienated from the ecological side of human nature. If we take the ecological side of our being seriously, then we need to incorporate environmental considerations into all aspects of our lives, including the aesthetic. This doesn't mean, for example, that all *art* must, say, address ecological or natural themes. Nor does it mean that we cannot attribute expressive qualities to nature in an analogical fashion. There's no harm in saying that we saw an angry storm or a gentle sunset:

aesthetic quality words, we remember, do double duty between their ordinary functions and their aesthetic ones. We don't suppose that nature *expresses* things so much as it appears *expressive of* certain emotions or ideas (Beardsley's human qualities) in a particularly environmental or sensuous way. The necessity of including nature in aesthetic analysis is crucial. An aesthetic theory completely lacking in attention to nature *as an object of appreciation in its own right* would be seriously deficient.

Without aesthetic attention to nature we would suffer a kind of aesthetic deprivation. As stated earlier, some people will always prefer nature (Santayana), while others will always choose art (Gadamer). This preference for one or the other does not matter, since their properties are so different and hence some taste-variations are bound to occur. We don't feel compelled to force everyone to like opera as much as literature - why should we insist that everyone like art and nature equally well? What does matter is the centrality to aesthetics not of art or nature per se, but of the relations between properties which make individual objects pleasing in perception. The reason nature cannot be left out of aesthetic analysis is that its properties combine in uniquely pleasing ways, ways not found in art. We wouldn't try to justify the beauty of an opera by reference to the standards of literary criticism, however much they might be referred to in analogy. The aesthetic appreciation of nature has been part of human life (if not a part of recent aesthetic theory) for thousands of years and there is no reason to suppose that we should abandon it now, unless we are to abandon that side of our being which feels affinity for and kinship with the natural environment.

So, while there is a continuity between art and nature based on their ability to promote pleasure through beautiful relations of properties, there is nevertheless a qualitative difference between the two, such that art theory cannot exhaust the theory of beauty. To say that aesthetic experience isn't somehow perceptual - that it is ultimately cognitive - is to distort the experience as we know it. Yet, art does have a cognitive dimension, one not adequately explained by theories about the sensuously beautiful. If we want to talk about art as an aesthetic (as opposed to a merely historical) object, how can we do so without sacrificing that cognitive dimension which often stands in distinct relation to art's sensuous/intelligible properties? How does *aesthetic* talk about art differ from aesthetic talk about nature, such that talk about art cannot ultimately define talk about nature? These, I think, are questions to be answered by referring to art's recognisably intelligible properties, a *kind* of property not possible in nature.

Of course not all talk about art needs to focus on non-sensuous or culturally-informed properties. One can appreciate a Rothko painting or a Giacometti sculpture without knowing the first thing about the cultural contexts or abstract ideas inherent in them. They can be enjoyed in virtue of their interacting surface properties, the texture and colour working together to produce grimly resilient little figures (Giacometti), the melting of subtle shades in one small space (Rothko). The bigger problem for aesthetic theory is to explain how to talk about expressive, representative or allusive works without leaving the realm of the aesthetic (Kant recognises this problem explicitly). One pole of possibility involves bracketing reference or expression, to focus only on those properties on the surface of the work itself, the relations internal to it. The other pole is to ignore the sensuous or intelligible surface of the object altogether, and discuss the way a work ties into its cultural or historical context. My approach is to steer between the two poles by holding onto the surface at all times but recognising that some surface properties are recognisably intelligible or *ideo-sensory*. By *ideo-sensory* I mean those perceptual properties that, in the mere perception of them, embody and communicate an idea (sometimes ideas, like Kant's complex aesthetic ideas) to the perceiver who is fit to interpret that idea.

For example, an American would recognise a sharply-delineated red octagon within a painting as the symbol for a roadway stop-sign, and might talk not only about the sensual impact of the colour-blotch in relation to the other sensuous properties, but also about the way the relation between the blotch and its cultural significance enter into the 'meaning' of the work. Let's assume that the colour blotch is boldly located in the left foreground of a picture which shows a man sitting, with his head in his hands, on what looks like a police station bench. The picture is dominated by grey, brown and blue hues, so the red octagon really stands out. A tourist from Britain - one who hasn't spent any time driving in the United States - might find the painting enigmatic and pleasing but not quite 'understand' it. Then, along comes a gallery assistant who refers to the hint of a whiskey bottle in the man's pocket, and a small set of keys in his hand. She then shows the tourist a stop sign outside the gallery, and suggests that the colour blotch might refer to such a sign in its roadway connotations.

The tourist might then begin to see that the man is probably not tired but regretful, or maybe drunk, or both. Has he failed to stop? If he is regretful, did his failure to stop hurt someone? There are signs of drinking and driving, an issue recently raised in both British and American public consciousness. Does the picture's tone suggest pessimism? (My example lacks subtlety!) While there is no *objection* to enjoying the painting as a series of sensuous relations without overarching meaning, one might, by failing to recognise the *ideo-sensory* character of the colour blotch, fail to see some of the paintings properties ('a stop-sign like blotch') and the qualities it lends to a work. In other words, while art's properties remain at all times perceptual, some of these perceptual



properties will be properly *ideo-sensory*. In literary art the perceptual aspect of the properties is sometimes only a vehicle for the proper aesthetic properties, though the way a line 'sounds' even in one's inner ear can be a source of aesthetic pleasure. We recognise that some art works are bearers of *meaning* and that nature, while *having* meaning for us, does not *convey* meaning in a direct, recognisable way.

Art is intended to support disinterested, absorbed contemplation and, while the intention itself is a conceptual consideration, we can often recognise perceptual signs of that intention in an object's surface. Art reveals not only perceptual but *syntactic* relations, after the manner of discursive communication but presenting meaning in a uniquely powerful way not reducible to words. Dabney Townsend thinks that art contains *imperatives* which necessarily guide our perceptions. This is true not only of art's formal properties; nature's surface too may contain properties which dominate in an immediate way, but our perspective with regard to nature is flexible. The very frame of a picture controls our response, as does the orchestra's location on the proscenium stage or the pages in novel-form of a book. These sorts of devices are external; they surround or encompass the work. Yet, this is not what Townsend means by imperatives. They are neither genres nor perceptual properties of the work. Rather, they are those singular relations that tie what is perceived, to beauty and/or the web of human meaning, relations which have no significance beyond the perceived work.

Within the work imperatives function to guide our appreciation. The red octagon demands our attention and from that we begin to question its presence, trying to relate its prominent location, its practical meaning and its symbolic power to the painting as a whole. The entire work contains imperatives for the way we relate one aspect of the work to another: if, instead of a man with his head in his hands we saw a party going on in the background, it would be difficult to interpret the work as expressive of regret. Imperatives are 'instructions for dealing with information and objects.'<sup>17</sup> The recognition of imperatives does not require, for example, acquaintance with the intentions or psychology of the artist, even though it is the artist who infuses the work with imperatives. Rather, imperatives make demands on those who understand the cultural context of the work, the web of meaning surrounding its production. Some works will have very few imperatives, some a great many. The key to unearthing them, and the properties and relations which are made clear by them, is attention to the work in light of its reflection of cultural and perceptual content.

It is clear from earlier chapters that the aesthetic appreciation of nature comes with a context, the natural environment enclosing oneself at any given place and time. Limitations upon what and how we perceive are a function of our own capacities in communion with the perceptual elements available. While artworks do not individually make use of our entire sensuous being the way the

natural environment does (frames and expressive aspects of a work limit our perspective and interpretation), they nevertheless come with a context, one which limits and determines the manner of our perception. Some works of art are appreciated largely in virtue of their sensuous surfaces, but generally we not only appreciate the way something *looks* or *sounds* but also the way in which the perceptual character of the work conveys levels of meaning beyond the surface itself. The relation between the 'idea' or cultural consideration beyond the work, and the property or relations which suggest the idea in a work, can itself be of an aesthetic character. We appreciate a painting not only because it presents us with well-executed, beautifully arranged faces, but because it conveys a sense of sadness and despondency through those faces in a new and highly individual way. The sadness isn't the hard part to locate, nor is the arrangement of properties. What is difficult to articulate, in especially innovative works of art, is the character of the relation between these two, a character that gives the work its unique meaning.

(ii)

I have already acknowledged art's ability to express something, or to convey information, without necessarily achieving beauty in our perception. This raises the question of how far external elements or relations can be tied into a work without losing the aesthetic focus of appreciation. Unlike Wollheim, I don't think that art considerations define the aesthetic, so the mere presence of effective communication in a work doesn't guarantee its aesthetic success. For a start, I would say that factual information is useful insofar as it enhances perception but it should nevertheless not become the entire *point* of our contemplation and consideration of an object. Extra-perceptual information can inspire our contemplation and even inform it, but in order for our estimation to be aesthetic, the focus must be on the properties of the work, either in relation to each other or in relation to some aspect of culture which is discernibly harnessed by a property (ideo-sensory property).

The term 'ideo-sensory' was coined by T.E. Jessop in the article 'The Objectivity of Aesthetic Value' and by it Jessop means those properties whose aesthetic impact is primarily intelligible rather than sensuous, i.e., the properties of literary works.<sup>18</sup> I have modified Jessop's use of the term to fit not only those properties of art which are *primarily* intelligible but also those properties which have both a sensuous and an intelligible dimension, such that something can be both crucial to the formal composition *and* the meaning of the work (my British tourist could appreciate the stop-sign painting in virtue of its surface, without tapping into its meaning). And, while Jessop claims for art that it can achieve *more than* beauty, I wish to add that, yes, art can communicate in a way that nature cannot, but art can also communicate *beautifully*. Beauty isn't limited to a blithe arrangement of pleasant perceptual features; it reflects our consciousness of a wide range of

pleasing aesthetic relations. Sometimes art will merely communicate, achieving the aesthetic minimum but falling short of beauty. Sometimes it will be beautiful in sensuous terms, physically striking, without implying anything else. And sometimes (these being the cases with which I'm here most concerned) art objects strike the eye as pleasing in part because of the beauty of their ideo-sensory properties, properties which harness cultural considerations in an aesthetic manner.

The introduction of the 'ideo' to art's sensuous surface allows perceptual features to exist in discernible relation to ideas, emotions, concepts or other objects beyond the work. One place where such properties are evident is in film, where horrific stories and scenes can nevertheless express certain ideas or sentiments in perceptually-satisfying ways. Of course, the external ideas or emotions must show up in the surface of the work but part of art's aesthetic dimension is the freshness with which old ideas and emotions are conveyed. The key to judging artworks in virtue of their properties is to acknowledge that some properties are ideo-sensory and that the way some features express or convey information beyond them - the relation between perceptual feature and idea that goes to 'make up' the ideo-sensory property - is itself an aesthetic consideration.

Thus, the film *Taxi Driver* tells the familiar story of the mentally-unbalanced outsider rebelling against his society, but does so not only through highly individual characterisations, bleak city-scapes and empathetic subplots, but also in light of the social plight of Vietnam veterans, American guilt about it and the rising crime rates during a fixed (and yet morally enduring) period in American history. These latter features are not the *subject* of the film but rather the cultural context of the film, conveyed subtly in features of the work. One can *perceive* the relevance of Vietnam to the story without having to hear an *explanation about* Vietnam during the film. Symbolic and ideo-sensory meaning is *elastic* in art, such that ideo-sensory properties are aesthetically irrelevant (or lack their *particular meaning*) outside their instantiation in the work that gives them their meaning - that is, until the work itself becomes so influential that certain of its properties themselves become individually communicative and recognisable. Think of Garbo, 'I want to be alone', or Venus on the half-shell, or Eisenstein's Odessa Steps sequence, or the opening bar of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. These properties and features from certain works will sometimes be alluded to in another. In this way, artworks become part of the cultural context surrounding artworks, and new objects 'quote', parody or allude to previous ones - an expressive and representative capacity not shared by nature.

Beautiful natural environments, of course, can be experienced again and again because their climatic and ecological context is always changing (if not a particular place's geographical context). Just as *Taxi Driver* can convey an old story in a new way, with the result that a new aesthetic object ensues, so can the same geographical place yield many fresh impressions and

feelings. In order to herald others to your pleasure, to share your vision with them, you cite the way the unique aesthetic properties of the object fit together. The problem with using art as a *paradigm* for assessing all beauty is not so much that it holds out standards that other, non-art objects cannot reach, but that it fails to comprehend the complexity of aesthetic interaction between properties. The *kind* of properties present give rise to highly specific relations, but the character of those properties is manifested *perceptually*.

Art-properties will often be discernably 'meaningful'. Even when we do not understand the relations of these properties or the 'message' they are trying to convey, we do understand that they *are* trying to say *something*, if only 'look here'. When we look at art, we are often but not always moved by the work to tie it into some greater cultural, historical or even artistic context. This does not mean that knowing a painting to be by Picasso is a relevant *aesthetic* consideration. That is an art-historical or commercial consideration, unless identifiably Picasso-esque features show up in the work - which they often do! Rather, it means that an appreciation of *Guernica* is enhanced by knowing something about the battle of the same name, the innovation of Picasso's approach and how it expresses the disjointed sense of life during war. Yes, I can appreciate the object merely as a physical object but to do so would be to fail to unlock other, more complex levels of appreciation which lead to an expanded sense of the thing's beauty.

Nature-properties will often be discernably independent of our interest and wills but, most importantly for aesthetic theory, they will be perceptually *other* than human: we recognise them as belonging to communities or processes not of our making. We can truncate our experience of nature by looking at it as if it were just an object (as we can with art) but in doing this we miss out on the multi-sensuous impact of nature appreciated as an environment, a place. We might say that in making of nature merely a visual object, or weakly imaginative substitute for art, we again cut ourselves off from more complex levels of appreciation which expand a thing's beauty. In other words, nature's features taken in isolation prevent our experiencing the *natural environment* aesthetically; art's features taken in isolation may prevent our experiencing its *cultural context* aesthetically. In both cases we miss out on the crucial aesthetic element of *relation* - that which makes a thing unique in perception. Art controls our responses more rigidly but yields more enduring instances of communication and meaning. The singular beauties of natural environments are less stable and do not communicate at all, but they offer opportunities for exhilarating aesthetic experiences through multi-sensuous awareness of place. Each, taken after the other in a metaphorical sense, can offer guidance in perception but in aesthetic *theory*, reduction of one to the other obscures that which is common and yet unique to both: the relational and qualitatively singular configuration of aesthetic properties.



### III. RELYING ON SCIENCE: ALLEN CARLSON AND THE AESTHETICS OF ORGANIC UNITY

#### 1. Beauty as Biodiversity

##### (i)

In contrast to models of aesthetic appreciation which take art as the central aesthetic object and apply its standards to nature, there are other theories which use scientific categories and knowledge to establish a framework for estimating natural beauty. I shall examine two of these here, one derived from the work of Allen Carlson, the other from geographer Jay Appleton's writings. Of the two, Carlson's has been offered as a *philosophical* approach to nature's beauty and for this reason I devote most of my analysis to it.

In Chapters Four and Seven I discussed the difference between aesthetic knowledge and that which issues from rules, standards or principles. Especially important to this difference is the necessarily subjective component of aesthetic experience, such that the estimation of beauty requires personal acquaintance with the object for which the claim is made: in order for the object of beauty to 'appear', the critic must apprehend it personally and without the constraint of its functional or practical connotations. In light of this it is curious that contemporary aesthetic writing about nature moves away from the teachings of Kant and Schopenhauer towards methods of basing nature's beauty on science. I'll consider Appleton's evolutionary theory of beauty in the next section. Here, I am concerned with the theories most visibly promoted by Allen Carlson.

Carlson's philosophy makes three major claims. One, that nature as aesthetic object is a different *kind* of thing than art and thus deserves a different sort of aesthetic/critical attention. Two, that, seen correctly, *all* nature is 'beautiful'; and three, that correct seeing depends upon knowledge of the appropriate aesthetic categories for nature. Strangely enough this last view is contingent upon an acceptance of *art's* categorical dependence upon history and criticism (after Kendall Walton), rather than on its presentation of properties that differ perceptually from nature's. In other words, the argument for the relevance of scientific categories to natural beauty depends upon the acceptance of an art theory which allows non-perceptual factors to be *necessary* components of correct aesthetic judgements about art. Carlson calls this dependence upon cognitive categories the 'cultural account of aesthetics'. I reject the argument for the necessary relevance of non-perceptual factors to art judgements and thus reject the implications of a scientific account of natural beauty which is founded upon an analogy with it. However, before looking more closely at the intricacies of Carlson's assertions about scientific categories, I need to examine his first two claims, which the

category theory serves.

(ii)

In discussing Carlson's work I shall draw on seven of his published works, and shall hereafter refer to them by abbreviation in the text. These articles and abbreviations are:

'Appreciation and the Natural Environment' (1979)	-	ANE	19
'Nature, Aesthetic Judgement and Objectivity' (1981)	-	NJO	20
'Environmental Aesthetics in Interdisciplinary Perspective' (1982)	-	INT	21
'Towards Models of Aesthetic Appreciation' (1982)	-	MOD	22
'Nature and Positive Aesthetics' (1984)	-	NPA	23
'Saito on the Correct Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature' (1986)	-	SAITO	24
'Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature' (forthcoming 1992)	-	AAAP	25

Carlson's first claim, that what nature *is* - a different *kind* of thing than art - necessitates a reformulation of aesthetic theory in regard to it, grows out of his belief that nature's organic unity leads to significant environmental-aesthetic considerations.

Natural objects possess what might be called an organic unity with their environment of creation: such objects are a part of and have developed out of the elements of their environments by means of the forces at work within those environments. Thus the environments of creation are aesthetically relevant to natural objects. (ANE, p. 269)

I agree with the fundamental point underlying Carlson's claim: nature's environmental impact does make it a special case for aesthetics. However, my interpretation of this impact, in aesthetic terms, stems from nature's phenomenological character, environmental history and interaction as *perceived* in the object before us, not just narrated with *reference to* the object. Carlson goes beyond nature's perceptual features to the cognitive category of 'nature', to establish his scientific theory. He claims that there is merit in 'regarding as correct the categories of what things in fact are, or, as we described them earlier, the common sense and/or "scientific" categories which are determined by the naturalist and the natural scientist.' (NJO, p. 24) This view is echoed by others, including J.M. Moravcsik, who claims that 'it does not matter if some of the essential characteristics...are not observational.'<sup>26</sup> Correct aesthetic appreciation of nature for Carlson, as we saw in Chapter Six, necessarily depends upon apprehending and judging it within a certain cognitive category.

One implication of this, which I have discussed, is that non-perceptual factors 'count' in aesthetic judgements about nature and that recognition of 'beauty' is derivative of non-perceptual

knowledge about cognitive categories. For Carlson, the aesthetic experience of nature is not only incomplete, but incorrect, without regard for the aesthetic object as natural in fact. However, this is complicated by a distinction that Carlson himself introduces. On the one hand Carlson argues that any aesthetics 'which bifurcates the class of aesthetic objects and suggests an essentially different and weaker philosophical account of those about nature than of those about art seems counterintuitive.' (NJO, pp. 17-18) Yet, on the other hand, he admits that 'modern environmentalist philosophy is based on bio-ethics rather than aesthetics *per se* : beauty is to be sought in the diversity and balance of ecological processes that are unimpaired by man and in the way of life that reveres and protects wild nature.' (INT, p. 11) In establishing scientific categories and ethical lifestyles as guides for correct appreciation of nature, is Carlson *expanding aesthetic* theory, or is he bifurcating it into classes of aesthetic and organic<sup>27</sup> objects, such that the latter receive weaker *aesthetic* treatment (and more environmental-ethical treatment) in his account? I think Carlson dilutes the aesthetic account of nature with scientific and ethical considerations, with the result that his theory of nature's beauty is an *aesthetically weak* one - a violation of his own standards, as stated above.

Carlson promotes the cognitive *naturalness* of nature in his aesthetic account, and is not the only thinker to do so. Rob Elliot, as we have seen, argues for the importance of nature's naturalness even when it is unperceived. In 'Faking Nature' he offers the example of an "Experience Machine", not unlike today's talk of "Virtual Reality", in which we can experience the full sensuous range of the experience of walking through wilderness without actually doing so. Elliot says that our enjoyment of the experience would cease once we were told that our experience was artificial, because we value things for the *kind* of things they are.<sup>28</sup> As I have argued, we might experience disappointment, though not necessarily on aesthetic grounds. And I agree with Elliot that we do value nature in part because of what it is - its independence from our interests - but this is different from valuing it aesthetically. Elliot and Carlson represent a current tendency in environmental philosophy to obscure the difference between aesthetic and other kinds of valuing. 'By properly distinguishing between aesthetic and non-aesthetic values which people attribute to nature, some of the burden can be removed from what is thought to be purely aesthetic disagreement about nature.'<sup>29</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that it is the phenomenon of nature's surface properties in relation that excites our aesthetic interest; ideas about genesis interest as well, but in a different way. Aesthetic value may contribute to nature's overall value - *one* reason for preserving an area might be its beauty - but Carlson's attempt to base nature's beauty in environmental science and ethics weakens his *aesthetic* analysis of it, even though he is attempting to make nature more valued by promoting its beauty. By setting conceptual boundaries in relation to the aesthetic

assessment of nature, Carlson constructs a theory that diminishes nature's *genuinely* aesthetic impact while at the same time *claiming* that all nature is beautiful. This brings us to his second major assertion.

(iii)

Carlson makes the claim that nature, when appreciated under the correct conceptual categories, will always be aesthetically pleasing or beautiful. In predicating beauty of all nature Carlson is trying to do away with the 'feedback' dimension of criticism or judgement discussed earlier in the thesis. However, while I agree that feedback is inappropriate, even irrational, in the face of the natural environment, I find Carlson's claim about the beauty of all nature to be implausible. I shall demonstrate that his basic assertion is untenable but in doing so I acknowledge that Carlson's claim has shifted in its presentation over time. For this reason my initial discussion takes account of the difference between his earlier and later versions of the claim.

In his earlier assertion, put forward in 'Nature and Positive Aesthetics', Carlson defines positive aesthetics as that which holds virgin nature, untouched by man, to be essentially beautiful, and accounts for this by citing the intimate relationship between perceiving nature's beauty and knowledge of natural science. (NPA, p. 5) In this version of his claim Carlson clings to the use of the aesthetic term 'beauty', predicating it of nature in its untouched state. Therefore, his claim amounts to this: virgin nature, when apprehended through the conceptual categories of science, will yield what we call beauty, that same quality we attribute to some artworks. Carlson's invocation of scientific categories is not just pedagogical, as we have seen; science *determines how* we should view nature in the first place. However, in extending the efficacy of science beyond pedagogy and into the realm of defining principles, Carlson sets a trap for himself.

If science does no more than enhance our perceptiveness with regard to nature's beauty, as I think it does, then the conclusion that all nature is beautiful is not feasible: a sophisticated knowledge of a piranha's eating habits does not make its devouring of your hand somehow beautiful. Yet, if science is not only pedagogically significant but in fact guarantees the beauty of nature, we begin to depart from the notion of 'aesthetic' that I have defended throughout the thesis, the notion that rejects principles or *a priori* governing conditions. I shall return to these problems momentarily.

In the later version of his claim, given in the forthcoming 'Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature', Carlson alters his vocabulary so as to modify the understanding of beauty. His major assertion is that nature contains 'ordered' rather than 'designed' patterns, where design reflects



social categories of intention and art history. Since these social categories are inapplicable to nature (inapplicable, along with traditional aesthetic concepts like beauty), Carlson distinguishes the appreciation of design from the appreciation of ordered patterns, where ordered patterns 'narrate' the factual dimension of the object under consideration. 'In this sense all nature is equally appreciable and therefore selection among all that the natural world offers is not of much ultimate importance. As Arp<sup>30</sup> observes, "in nature a broken twig is equal in beauty and importance to the clouds and stars."' (AAAN, pp. 35-36)

Order appreciation tells the 'story' of science. This story brings us to appreciate nature's appearance at every level because, unlike design appreciation, which engages in critical feedback, order appreciation makes us understand the mechanics of nature. Thus, all natural objects, 'to the extent that they are appreciable at all, are more or less equally appreciable - equal in beauty and importance.' (AAAN, p.36) In one sense Carlson preserves the idea of 'order' in regard to nature because he recognises that, without some sort of pattern-recognition, our experience of nature would be a meld of sensations, far removed from what we refer to as aesthetic appreciation in art. (ANE, p. 272) But why he thinks that an understanding of nature's genesis and mechanics will yield aesthetic pleasure, is puzzling.

Certainly an understanding of an artwork's genesis does not insure its aesthetic success - why should we assume that a similar kind of knowledge (with admittedly different content) should lead to the aesthetic success of nature? Carlson's theory in fact doesn't establish that scientific categories lead to beauty (I shall take this up in the next section); it begins with the assumption that all nature is equally appreciable and redefines appreciation as acquaintance with nature's scientific story. In other words, the appreciation of nature is not aesthetic at all.

[I]n order appreciation an individual *qua* appreciator selects objects of appreciation from things around him and, as noted, does so by reference to a general non-aesthetic and non-artistic account which, by revealing the order imposed by the various forces, random and otherwise, which produced the selected objects, makes them appreciable. (AAAN, p. 24)

Order appreciation 'focuses on aesthetic qualities which result from applying an after the fact story to a pre-existent object.' (AAAN, p. 37) Again, there is a necessity here to differentiate between aesthetic appreciation in virtue of surface properties (Carlson has never been fond of surface properties: 'perceptual properties are not adequate to determine correctness of category.' NJO, p. 21) and other kinds of appreciation. On the one hand Carlson talks about virgin nature being equally *beautiful*, thus harnessing aesthetic words and their connotations to further his theoretical ends; on the other hand he distinguishes between the kind of estimation of design that

we expect to result in beauty, and an historically-oriented estimation that eschews surface relations and differentiation between levels of beauty. If all nature is *beautiful*, then we mean something quite different by beauty than is usually supposed. If all nature is *appreciable*, then it is not equally appreciable in terms of what we usually mean by beauty, but in terms of something else.

The biggest and most obvious problem with Carlson's claim about all nature being beautiful/equally appreciable, is that it uses aesthetic quality words (beauty, pattern) while engaging in non-aesthetic estimation. Appreciating order is not the same thing as appreciating beauty, so to promote nature's *aesthetic* value through a recognition of order makes no sense. Even if it did, we would still see a violation between the recognition of scientific categories or orders and the *causal* relationship this has to the experience of beauty in Carlson's account.

Another problem is that, if we take Carlson's claims to be aesthetic claims, or as residing somewhere in the neighbourhood of aesthetic theory, then they seem, outright, to be wrong. The idea of a broken twig being equally appreciable, in virtue of how it got to be that way, to our appreciation of clouds or stars, may be tenable if what we mean by 'appreciation' is an understanding of the processes involved. However, when we move from matters of fact into matters of aesthetics, the beauty of a broken twig is by no means certain to be of equal beauty to clouds and stars. We can't *make* such claims prior to experiencing the objects at hand, and certainly we talk about *this* twig and *those* stars. As Donald Crawford claims, Carlson's environmental view

essentially does away with natural beauty. The scrawniest, bleeding chicken at the lowest end of the pecking order is as rightful a candidate for appreciation as a part of the natural order as is the handsomest peacock. Anything can be appreciated from this perspective, and it is difficult<sup>31</sup> to see how a place remains for judgements of relative aesthetic quality.

Carlson's 'stories' lose their footing in aesthetics by relying too heavily on factual accounts of natural history which are not verified in the aesthetic surface of the object. Even my account of ideo-sensory properties in art requires the *perceptual recognition* of the conceptual context expressed in or through a work. Carlson puts a lot of weight on the non-aesthetic story of nature because he wishes to make all nature 'appreciable' in order to increase our respect and consideration for it. That is, Carlson's aesthetic theory is fuelled by a distinctly ethical or political interest: the preservation of the natural environment. Kant, as we know, banishes interest from aesthetic appreciation. Carlson himself concurs with this at one point: 'experience of environment which is motivated by particular purpose is non-aesthetic.' (MOD, p. 160) Yet, he claims that there is 'ethical merit' in applying accurate factual categories to aesthetic objects (NJO, p. 24), and also that environmental philosophy is motivated not by aesthetics but by bio-ethics: we seek beauty

in ecological processes and in 'a way of life that reveres and protects wild nature.' (INT, p. 11) 'Carlson's argument against the formalist appreciation of nature motivated by ethical concern does not succeed so long as it is presented as an aesthetic argument.'<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Carlson's claim looks circular: he asserts that all nature is beautiful or appreciable when we understand it correctly; and that the correct categories are *conceived* in a way which serves to make all nature equally appreciable or beautiful. In addition, Carlson must still wrestle with the challenges posed by my version of aesthetic theory. Either his ordered patterns are at most pedagogical devices, which means that they will not always bring us to see beauty in nature, where beauty is construed as relations between aesthetic properties; or all nature is equally appreciable on his account of ordered patterns but this account loses the aesthetic dimension claimed for it. To be fair, Carlson does, in his later version of the claim, move away from considerations of design towards a 'different' conception of pattern. However, if he wishes to define a new area of value with respect to nature - one of understanding genesis - he should move away from loaded aesthetic-quality words in making his points. In 'Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature' he still relies on terms like 'beauty' and 'pattern'. Given his rejection of conventional aesthetic practice, Carlson is not justified in his loose employment of terms which have connotations other than the ones he gives them. This brings me to Carlson's third major claim, namely, that a proper aesthetic estimation of nature will be conceived in a *manner* analogous to that of art, where both art and nature rely for their beauty on their locations in a context specific to their genesis.

## 2. Science: The Source of Correct Aesthetic Categories

### (i)

Carlson chooses science, as opposed to religion or some other cognitive framework, to tell the story of nature's appreciable qualities because 'it not only presents itself as the source of objective truth, it brands alternative accounts as subjective falsehoods and therefore, in accord with objective appreciation, as irrelevant to aesthetic appreciation.' (AAAN, p.34) Saito has questioned Carlson's choice of framework, arguing that 'there can be no reason why the scientific category is always aesthetically more appropriate than other categories...Moreover, sometimes it may be aesthetically more interesting to view a natural object in a category other than the scientific category.'<sup>33</sup> I agree with Saito's objection, with the proviso that appreciation within a category means *perceiving* the relevance of that category in the surface of the object under consideration. Carlson, however, responds to Saito by distinguishing between 'relevance' and 'correctness' in aesthetics, claiming that science gives us a more *accurate* impression of what nature is, than anything else (but is a bird feather under the microscope included in the same sense of 'nature', as the bird feather

attached to a bird on a branch?). He also claims that scientific categories do reveal nature at its most aesthetically interesting. (SAITO, pp. 88-90) I think that Carlson is conflating the ideas of *understanding* how nature functions, and *knowing* nature as a phenomenal object: it is by no means clear that science enhances either our knowledge of, or pleasure in, nature as it is *apprehended*, especially in the self-to-setting mode supported in the last chapter. Still, we can learn more about why Carlson adopts the approach he does, by examining his affinity with Kendall Walton's 'Categories of Art'.<sup>34</sup>

According to Walton, the history of the artwork, including considerations of its genesis, is crucial to a correct aesthetic appreciation of it. 'Facts about the origins of works of art have an *essential* role in criticism...aesthetic judgements rest on them in an absolutely fundamental way.'<sup>35</sup> In this case it would be misleading to judge a work based only on its visible properties, because Walton's aesthetic judgements depend not only on non-aesthetic considerations, but also on which of a work's non-aesthetic 'properties' are "standard", "variable" or "contra-standard". Standard features belong to the category of work under consideration and are necessary for the work to belong in that category; variable features have nothing to do with a work's location in a certain category; and contra-standard features disqualify a work from being placed in a certain category.<sup>36</sup> We have to know a work's origin to figure out what category it belongs to; 'what aesthetic properties a work seems to have, what aesthetic effect it has on us, how it strikes us aesthetically, often depends (in part) on which of its features are standard, which variable and which contra-standard for us.'<sup>37</sup> Walton's theory seems to ignore the phenomenon of the work of genius, one which presents aesthetic relationships that are so radically fresh that they expand or contract the range of standard qualities. While some properties of works do strike us as conventionally or unconventionally a part of a certain kind of work, it is not clear that the presence of contra-standard properties removes the possibility of an object's being beautiful, even if it has no category at all.

Carlson takes an interest in Walton because Walton's theory seems to provide a way of 'measuring' an object in relation to its context, with the result that we can say whether or not an object and the judgement we make in relation to it are correctly placed. However, where Walton suggests that nature may be somewhat category relative<sup>38</sup> Carlson proposes a different *set* of categories to serve nature, categories that will be just as reliable for nature as Walton's are for art. Whereas the correct categories for judgement of artworks stem from the activities of artists and critics, the categories for correct judgements about nature grow out of the activities of naturalists and other scientists. (NJO, p. 22) For Carlson, 'this knowledge, essentially common sense/scientific knowledge, seems to me the only viable candidate for playing the role in regard to the appreciation of nature which our knowledge of art, artistic traditions, and the like plays in



regard to the appreciation of art.' (ANE, p. 273)

The first requirement for judging nature aesthetically in this way, according to Carlson, is that one have a knowledge of *different environments* (italics mine) within nature and of the systems and elements within those environments. (ANE, p. 273) This immediately disqualifies the person who knows *one* place inside and out, a person who could teach you much about the way that one place was beautiful, and I find this aspect of Carlson's theory surprisingly narrow and academic in a limiting way. He also approximates the categories he will use to natural kinds: 'particular natural kinds (elephants, horses) constitute categories which function psychologically as do categories of art.' (NJO, p. 19) As an example of this he notes a difficult case where 'the perceptual properties alone do not by themselves clearly indicate a correct category' (NJO, p. 21), specifically, that of a sea anemone which could be taken to be an animal or plant, and the whale, which we might take to be a fish instead of a mammal. And, scientific categories yield not only the correct method for appreciating nature; supposedly, their application is the surest route to *aesthetic pleasure*.

(ii)

Several objections can be raised against Carlson's adoption of scientific categories for aesthetic purposes. One, Carlson is a philosopher and yet he makes no allusion whatsoever to Kant or other important aesthetic theorists who claim that aesthetic appreciation does not proceed by considerations of what a thing is to be, conceptually. Kant distinguishes between appreciating a rose aesthetically and understanding it as a type of flower; Dewey notes that 'it is quite possible to enjoy flowers in their coloured form and delicate fragrance without knowing anything about plants theoretically.' One turns to science if one wants to understand the process of flowering<sup>39</sup> or if one wishes to enhance one's aesthetic appreciation by making certain perceptual aspects of the flower more visible. Even Hegel distinguishes between science, which reflects reason's discovery of itself in nature, and aesthetic awareness, which is not constrained by interest or category.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the conventional category of a natural object will matter more in aesthetic appreciation than the relations between a single object and its context or environment as given in perception.

Carlson's whale can be 'known' perceptually, and in some depth, without one being aware that it is a mammal with certain biological functions and properties. If I live in a coastal town and sometimes participate in a 'whale-watch' offshore, it is possible that knowledge about the whale as a mammal may direct my senses in a particular manner. For instance, I might take special notice of the whale's 'hole' where it breathes and spouts water, unlike fish who have gills. However, knowing that the hole or spout are manifestations of the whale's mammalian nature has little to do

with the aesthetic impact of perceiving the whale in its environment. Similarly, understanding that whales are mammals and thus give birth to and care for their cubs in a recognisably maternal fashion, may encourage me to take more notice of the interaction between mother and cub when they play or sing together. Yet, if one has the opportunity to observe whales closely (which I have), one knows that the majesty, speed and grace of their sleek, massive bodies rising from ocean depths, strikes one in a highly specialised, aesthetically and even emotionally moving way, a way not circumscribed by conceptual categories.

In one sense the aesthetic reveals a much more primitive relation between ourselves and nature, than does science. *How* creatures of the whale's size - sometimes larger than our 40 foot boat - manage to move and make sounds in so musical a fashion, is of less concern in *aesthetic* appreciation, than is the perception *that they do move and sound* that way. I have argued at length that scientific and aesthetic knowledge promote different *ways* of seeing; in nature, aesthetic knowing is enhanced by, but ultimately not dependent on, cognitive categories or scientific considerations. Recall Sibley's prohibitions against rules and standards.

For in using aesthetic terms too we learn from samples and examples, not rules, and we have to apply them, likewise, without guidance by rules or readily applicable procedures, to new and unique instances. <sup>41</sup>

This raises yet another question in regard to Carlson's scientific categories, namely, are these categories supposed to yield aesthetic judgements once we know how they work, or do they simply tell us what something is? Most crucially for Carlson, if such categories are supposed to lead to a greater perception, or a correct perception, of beauty or aesthetic appreciability, *how* is it that *scientific* categories exert an influence on our aesthetic responsiveness?

(iii)

As argued in previous chapters, the individual arrangement of properties found in any artwork or natural place are resistant to schematization: even if you discover what makes one work or object beautiful, that same reason cannot be given to justify another object's beauty unless the object is exactly the same. In other words, aesthetic judgements are singular and function in reference to individual objects, events, places, etc. Knowing that this creature is a whale and not a big fish will not necessarily lead to my seeing it as beautiful, even if it gives me a better appreciation of that creature's anatomy and species-traits. In the previous section I noted that Carlson is unclear about *how* scientific categories are supposed to cause aesthetic appreciation. My own view, by now clear, is that scientific information can guide but not determine beauty in nature. Carlson's approach, used by him and others, has been queried in other places.

F. David Martin, in his article 'Architecture and the Aesthetic Appreciation of the Natural Environment', questions Carlson's use of scientific information as a system of rules for finding beauty. '[H]ow does that information help us order into some kind of hierarchy our meld of sensations - such as the song of the bird, the smell of the hay, the feel of the earth, the vista of the sky?' <sup>42</sup> While Carlson continues to promote the use of science in discovering 'ordered' patterns, even in his most recent writings, he remains vague in his instructions to scientists and naturalists, vague about what it is, exactly, that they are supposed to *do*.

A former research fellow under Carlson, Yrjo Sepanmaa, adopts and develops Carlson's scientific approach to natural beauty in his book *The Beauty of Environment: A General Model for Environmental Aesthetics*. He makes several claims like the one quoted here.

The task of environmental aesthetics in a metacritical sense is the theoretical control of the description, interpretation and evaluation of the environment and the creation of a frame of reference. It constructs a model of how the environment is received, and in what way it operates as an aesthetic object. <sup>43</sup>

Like Carlson, Sepanmaa argues for categories which are appropriate to the aesthetic appreciation of nature and, while he goes into more depth than Carlson about what kinds of categorical considerations interface with the surface of the environment, he still fails to show how categorical knowledge can increase or even yield aesthetic results. Sepanmaa's book has been reviewed by Neil Evernden in *Environmental Ethics*. <sup>44</sup> Since Evernden's observations about Sepanmaa's book coincide with my own criticisms of Carlson's theory, I shall consider them here, with the intention of showing their relevance to a general critique of Carlson's scientific approach to natural beauty.

Evernden's first point is that the ecological good does not always coincide with aesthetic pleasure. A selectively logged forest may be more beautiful in some instances than an untouched one; a pastoral landscape may be more beloved of tourists than wild areas or different ecosystems that preceded them. <sup>45</sup> Evernden also mentions that an acid rain lake may be found beautiful: to this Carlson might reply that such a judgement would involve aesthetic omissions if one was not aware of the acid rain, or that the beauty was okay in the thin sense but overridden in the thick sense. I have shown, in Chapter Six, how ethical constraints operate in aesthetics and so, in this instance, I would agree with Carlson that an acid rain lake may no longer be beautiful once we know the source of its colour. Evernden's point, however, is otherwise a strong one: there is no reason to suppose either that all nature will be beautiful or that nature itself is in every case more beautiful than artifice (though Carlson would not disagree with the latter point).

Evernden criticises Sepanmaa for a claim he makes about the benefit of science in environmental aesthetics, a claim he borrows from Allen Carlson.

I can think of no reason why the knowledge provided through ecology or geology should enhance our *aesthetic* appreciation of nature. At most, it would seem able to enhance the notion of uniqueness or historical significance, which may increase the fame of the site but does not seem to me to be an obvious influence on *aesthetic* judgement. I can only think that the author's conception of ecology is considerably different than my own.<sup>46</sup>

Evernden - a faculty member on an Environmental Studies program at York University in Great Britain expresses my own doubts about what Carlson seems to think of as an automatic affinity between scientific knowledge and aesthetic appreciation. While Carlson and Sepanmaa prescribe that science ought to teach us, after the manner of its categories, *how* to appreciate nature, they are neither clear on the relation between the two poles of experience, nor specific about what they mean by scientific categories. Carlson at one point focuses on natural kinds but it seems to me that judging an elephant in a herd with other elephants, and seeing it as one component of a beautiful place, are two different kinds of judgement: one is comparative and concerned with standards, the other is relational with respect to the creature in its environment. Even if ecological and scientific laws were somehow clear guides to aesthetic appreciation, Evernden points out that ecologists themselves are uncertain and in disagreement over what the governing laws and principles of their discipline *are* ! This is something that neither Carlson nor Sepanmaa acknowledge in their accounts.<sup>47</sup> As Saito observes, when arguing for the preservation of nature, the knowledge of the ecologist is essential, but when arguing for a particular appearance of beauty in the natural environment, a different kind of knowledge is required - the knowledge of aesthetic relations.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, Evernden suggests that Sepanmaa's book (and I extend this criticism to Carlson's body of work) doesn't give us an adequate or enlightening account of the aesthetic response to nature as 'a way in which society could ensure the preservation and appreciation natural beauty.'<sup>49</sup> While he admits that art centred theories do not provide us with any more adequate theory than the one proposed by Sepanmaa (and Carlson), he recognises that the approach based on preservation and scientific knowledge is no more useful. However, both theories fail for a similar reason: their failure to articulate an account of properties such that both nature and art are included in the aesthetic spectrum, without sacrifice of unique aesthetic content on either side.

Carlson's theory about the 'objectivity' of aesthetic judgement in relation to nature is based on Walton's theory of the categories of art, which itself argues for the centrality of non-perceptual factors in correct aesthetic judgements. I have tried to show that, in order for any estimation to



remain properly aesthetic, judgement must be levied in response to the aesthetic surface of the object. While in some cases that surface may be more intelligible than sensuous (as in the case of literary art), the idea of discernible relations based on one's encounter with the object in perception is absolutely definitive of the aesthetic. In this way no rules or standards can determine ahead of time what the aesthetic response to, and judgement in respect of, an object will be. And, while non-perceptual factors have pedagogical significance, they are relevant in three primary ways: one, they must alter the surface of the object in perception; two, they must provide some information which overwhelms our perception of the object such that we can no longer take pleasure in it; three, they must be tied in relation to some discernible, localised feature of the object itself, with the result that the feature is ideo-sensory in its relation to the whole object and the cultural context beyond it. Therefore, Carlson's theory, while motivated by an admirable cause and productive of many isolated and useful insights, does not manage to show that scientific categories and knowledge guide the proper aesthetic appreciation of nature.

However, there is another approach to the relationship between science and aesthetic appreciation of nature, which I would like to consider briefly here. I do not think it succeeds where Carlson's fails, but it nevertheless tackles the issue of the human response to beauty in a manner quite different to that of Carlson's.

#### IV. "PROSPECT-REFUGE" : THE PSYCHOBIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO BEAUTY

##### 1. Evolution and Its Aesthetic Manifestations

In some ways the evolutionary approach to environmental aesthetics is less didactic than Carlson's because it stresses not what we ought to do but rather what we might have been doing all along. Much like Burke, who sees the aesthetic response as an outgrowth of sexual and self-preservational instincts<sup>50</sup> theories which take the evolutionary approach to nature's beauty highlight the intimate relation between human aesthetic response and the environment which contains human creatures. The purpose of these accounts is not to prescribe standards but to uncover or describe the influences on our various responses. And, some of the work that has been done focuses on the relationship between human aesthetic responses and the 'aesthetic' responses of other animals. As Gordon Orians notes, 'the aesthetic senses of animals are likely to be related to their ecologies...the evolution of animal responses should be related to the functional significance of objects.'<sup>51</sup>

With respect to human responses, Orians says that, while flexible to a small degree, are nevertheless rooted in our evolutionary needs. In this way we respond most favourably to those landscapes which are 'emotionally associated with high resources levels for people'.<sup>52</sup> What this means is, we don't necessarily respond to landscapes which have actual or present economic or material resource value. Rather, we retain an emotional attachment for those landscapes which sustained us in the dawn of human civilization. Biologist Rene Dubos has observed that human rhythms continue to fluctuate according to rhythms linked to relationships between the movements of earth and moon, and of these to the sun; even hormonal responses to seasonal changes continue in an atmosphere of artificial constancy. From this Dubos concludes, 'modern man in his sheltered environment continues to be under the influence of cosmic forces even as he was when he lived naked in direct contact with nature.'<sup>53</sup> Dubos also cites the link between human aesthetic responsiveness and their important biological needs, suggesting that our behaviour, aesthetic and otherwise, is not terribly different from that of other creatures.

In one way this supports my assertion that a proper understanding of the beauty of nature necessitates sensuous as well as mental alertness in response to the environment. However, these views are normally developed in another direction, away from a theory of aesthetic properties, relations and articulation, and towards an account of aesthetics which sees our responsiveness as a *mechanised* feature of our existence. The clearest and most influential version of it has been put forward by geographer Jay Appleton.

## 2. Appleton's Theory of Ancestral Influence

### (i)

Appleton's theory lacks the polemicism and vague certainty of Carlson's 'objective' approach to natural beauty. He thinks that science can have relevance to aesthetic appreciation of nature, not in a didactic manner but as a way of uncovering the 'invisible underlying configuration [which] influences the configuration of the visible surface.'<sup>54</sup> I agree with this: scientific knowledge can give us a better understanding of the environment's surface such that we notice more about its properties in relation. However, Appleton cautions against too-superficial an understanding of the relationship between science and aesthetics, suggesting that science can only enhance, rather than dictate, what we do in fact find beautiful. He rejects an oversimplified equation between what is ecologically useful and what is beautiful, and argues instead that what *appears* to be ecologically beneficial for our species, is aesthetically relevant to analysis.

Appleton, unlike Carlson, also acknowledges the contribution made to the study of nature's

beauty by texts in the history of philosophy. Aesthetics has

attempted to clear the ground somewhat, so that we can see whether there are any indications of paths which might enable us to bring back 'nature' into the forefront of aesthetic discussion, where it used to be two hundred years ago but from which it has for so long been banished.<sup>55</sup>

Appleton views his own theory as a continuation of the path, a step rather than a leap in a specific direction. His approach occupies two tiers.

The first level of Appleton's theory maintains that the human being must be involved in their environment to find it aesthetically pleasing and that this involvement depends upon recreating 'something of that primitive relationship which links a creature with its habitat.'<sup>56</sup> The link between creature and habitat is asserted because Appleton sees presages of our own aesthetic activity in the activities of other animals and creatures in the environment. Appleton calls this level 'Habitat Theory' and means by it that 'aesthetic satisfaction, experienced in the contemplation of the landscape, stems from the spontaneous perception of landscape features which, in their shapes, colours, spatial arrangements and other visible attributes, act as sign-stimuli indicative of environmental conditions favourable to survival, whether they really *are* favourable or not.'<sup>57</sup> The second level of his theory he calls 'Prospect Refuge Theory', which, as an outgrowth of Habitat Theory, claims that when an animal has the opportunity to see without being seen, and shelter itself from hazard, it can relax and enjoy the aesthetic attributes of its surroundings - this is the root of our pleasure in certain types of landscapes.<sup>58</sup>

Appleton admits that our need for places to hide and yet see, is ecologically useless now, but that doesn't mean that our psychobiological apparatus has caught up with our actual needs: 'The machinery has been inherited and it insists on being used.'<sup>59</sup> This leads to the idea that the natural environment gives off signs or indications of safety to our primitive subconscious, such that we can interpret those signs and, no longer having any genuine need for them, can thus take aesthetic pleasure in the vistas and shelters they present. I find this an interesting interpretation of our aesthetic responsiveness to certain landscapes. Appleton realises that much of it is speculative and that we do not as yet have the apparatus to test his theories. In spite of these acknowledgements on Appleton's part, I nevertheless have queries about some of the more unsettling aspects of his theory.

On the one hand Appleton's theory offers some kind of explanation about why we find nature aesthetically appealing, even in a world of sophisticated and diverse artworks. 'If we see man in these terms, endowed innately with a mechanism for building a behavioural relationship with one kind of environment but living in another, we can hardly be surprised if he finds himself hankering after a visible environment in which he can recognise those sign-stimuli to which he naturally reacts.' <sup>60</sup> In one way this version of aesthetic responsiveness is not unlike Schopenhauer's renegade intellect, which transcends its practical purpose in grasping an aesthetic vision. Still, the idea that our aesthetic response to nature - and maybe even indirectly to everything - is mechanised and determined, is disquieting for two reasons.

We like to think of aesthetic appreciation as being in part dependent on the imaginative use and direction of one's senses and mind, employed in an effort towards appreciation. If Appleton's Prospect Refuge theory were true, then the idea that we can work at uncovering elusive or complex kinds of beauty is self-deluding. Since I believe we have a certain amount of flexibility with regard to nature - an ability to shift our perspective in a variety of ways - I find this implication of Appleton's theory unrealistic, or at least unreflective of the way we do usually direct our senses in the natural environment.

Another difficulty with Prospect Refuge is that, if it were true, it would leave unexplained the way we respond to the *ideo*-sensory properties of artworks. Instead, it is nature that furnishes 'signs' that indicate survival mechanisms, and the recognition of these signs, even though subconscious, is what promotes our feeling of aesthetic pleasure. This fails to account for the way that art is able, by means of *ideo*-sensory properties and relations, to give us pleasure, often of a challenging and hard-won sort. If natural environments fill a psychobiological 'need', then it is unclear how art too fills this need, or if it does not, what other kind of need it can fill. Appleton thinks that our response to vistas and shelters in nature grows out of an *immutable* need to locate such environments. This is, I think, fascinating and neither implausible nor oversimplified. But it challenges some of our most basic assumptions about aesthetic responsiveness and judgement, and renders aesthetic innovation a vague, unexplainable curiosity: why do we create art at all, if nature fills our immutable and mechanised needs? Especially, why do we create abstract art or music, which doesn't 'say' anything in direct symbols or signs? These questions - along with the question of how deserts or ice-tundras can be beautiful when they provide no shelters or vistas - are unanswered by Prospect Refuge theory. This theory also fails to mention the role of the lower senses in providing pleasure in the environment. Since Appleton himself admits the difficulty of testing his assertions at this point in time, I believe that his ideas are best taken as one way of *interpreting* our enduring attraction to natural beauty, even in an age of multifarious material products and artworks.



### 3. Some Conclusions about Science and Art

Having explored some of Appleton's basic ideas, ideas which reflect an evolutionary approach to natural beauty, it is interesting to note that Wittgenstein is quite adamant that 'aesthetic questions have nothing to do with psychological experiments, but are answered in an entirely different way.'<sup>61</sup> He stresses that puzzles about art (and aesthetic objects) and the effects it has are not puzzles about how the effects are *caused*. If our aesthetic responses were caused in the way that, say, gravity causes objects to attach to the earth, we would have what he calls a 'mechanics of the soul'. What Wittgenstein finds most perplexing is the fact that we approximate psychology to physics in our search for 'laws' that govern aesthetic responses, and yet physics is made up almost entirely of laws, while psychology has hardly any.<sup>62</sup> Physics can predict things by virtue of its laws; psychological pseudo-laws of taste predict practically nothing at all.

Further to this, Wittgenstein observes that in a court of law, when one is asked the motive for one's action, one is supposed to *know* it. One cannot be supposed to *know* the laws by which one's body and mind are governed.<sup>63</sup> So it is with aesthetics: when someone asks us the reasons we have for finding something aesthetically pleasing, or beautiful, we do not presume to answer with an account of our physiological and psychological processes - even if these do in fact exert an influence on our response. Rather, we attempt to articulate the relations that we find essential to a thing's presence, the perceptual information by which we should always know it again, and be moved or pleased. When we try to subsume the aesthetic appreciation of nature under the similar appreciation of art, we hide from ourselves a tendency to seek law-like standards for the way we *ought* to behave. Seeing a landscape as one would see a picture is possible, and even rewarding - but to claim that the conventions of painting *determine* our pleasure in a landscape reduces aesthetic imagination to one of Pavlov's dogs, where we salivate mentally whenever nature looks sufficiently like an artwork to 'cause' our pleasure. In addition, the art model of appreciation leaves out completely the very real impact made by the non-visual senses. It also fails to say much about why artworks themselves should please, other than that they are recognisable human products of a free sort. However, since not all art pleases by any means, there is no reason to suppose that nature should please in virtue of being merely art-like. We need to go beyond a theory of art as the central aesthetic object, to why objects please aesthetically at all.

The same holds true for scientific theories of estimation. When theories hold out scientific categories as guides to beauty, they fail to show how the relation between science and aesthetic appearance is characterised, or why science should lead to aesthetic responsiveness. Even those approaches like Appleton's, which attempt to explain in scientific terms why some objects please, are incomplete by virtue of leaving out those landscapes that seem in no way to conform to our

primitive ecological needs and yet are often very beautiful.<sup>64</sup> Such theories also provide no convincing reason for art's ability to please which in effect is similar *enough* to nature's ability to please, so as to be called 'aesthetic'. Again, a move beyond the causes of aesthetic pleasure, to the way we experience and articulate our pleasure in the presence of certain environments, yields the most promise for an aesthetic theory which is at once coherent in its inclusion of both art and nature, and comprehensive in its attendance to perceptual sensuous and ideo-sensory properties.

As Andrew Brennan has suggested, a more alert attendance to our environment will reveal unique properties of place; a view presaged by Schopenhauer's empirical affection for the environmental character of natural beauty. And as Kant - perhaps the patron saint of aesthetic theory if no longer that of natural beauty - has taught, such beauty is unique where found, subject to no formal laws, at the mercy of no principles of taste and not dependent on the ability of the observer to *articulate* those relations which prompt their sensitive engagement. Aesthetic *judgements*, when serious or public, call for something more than simple exclamations about beauty; but appreciation requires only the sincere engagement of one's senses and mind. Aesthetic imagination, like moral freedom, is one of the human being's unique and distinctive capacities. Without the *aesthetic* we lapse into fuzzy areas of conceptual configuration which are better expressed in historical, sociological or journalistic terms. Without the *imagination*, we are subject to those forces of nature, manifested in psychobiology, which make us no different, perhaps no more, than mechanically-complex creatures lacking semblance of soul or wit.

Aesthetic theories which deny the unique human capacity to be pleased by objects in *perception*, choose to elevate the context or the origin of an object at the expense of the object itself. While elucidation of contexts and origins is no bad thing - indeed, it can heighten our awareness and direct our senses more effectively - it obscures what philosophical aesthetics suggests should be the *emphasis* of aesthetic theory: the subjective engagement of the human being with uniquely striking perceptual (or intelligible) features in relation. I have tried to demonstrate that a close reading of the major aesthetic works of Kant and Schopenhauer offers to contemporary environmental aesthetics, those philosophical considerations currently being neglected or ignored. By developing these considerations in the context of recent aesthetic and environmental theory, I have presented a way of looking at appreciation and judgement which is bound to neither art nor science, but, rather, to perceptual features, aesthetic properties and descriptive qualities. Such an approach allows us to discern good judgements from bad ones without excluding from the arena of sincere appreciation those individuals who are sensitive but unschooled in artistic traditions or scientific categories.

Finally, I have suggested that nature's specifically aesthetic impact is often environmental and

multi-sensuous, yielding at once an awareness of ourselves as earth-rooted creatures and a sense, literally, that we and the universe as a whole are somehow connected. Our own human limitations and capacities provide a 'human scale' for assessment, giving natural landscapes and environments a boundary set by nothing other than the imaginative use of our senses. At present, our vocabulary for articulating nature's specific beauty is severely limited. I would suggest that, in opposition to abandoning the quest for a rich discourse in environmental aesthetics, we begin to recognise, and change, the limitations hitherto imposed on it by our own lack of imaginative flexibility with regard to nature.

## NOTES - CHAPTER NINE

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- <sup>2</sup> Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* ( Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 87.
- <sup>3</sup> Hegel, p. 2.
- <sup>4</sup> Stephen Bungay, *Beauty and Truth* , p. 15.
- <sup>5</sup> Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, p. 394.
- <sup>6</sup> Edmund Burke, *Enquiry into Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 101.
- <sup>7</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* , p.92.
- <sup>8</sup> Hans George Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful* ,p. 30.
- <sup>9</sup> Samuel Alexander, *Art and Nature* (Manchester University Press Reprints, from *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11(2), July 1927), p. 1. See also S. Alexander *Beauty and Other Forms of Value* ((MacMillan, 1938), p. 15.
- <sup>10</sup> Alexander, *Beauty and Other Forms of Value*, p. 22.
- <sup>11</sup> B. R. Tilghman, *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics: The View From Eternity* (MacMillan, 1991), p. 87.
- <sup>12</sup> Ruth Saw and Harold Osborne, 'Aesthetics as a Branch of Philosophy' *Aesthetics in the Modern World*, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>13</sup> Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (Penguin Books, 1975), section 42, p. 112.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> James Gleick, *Chaos*, p. 115.
- <sup>16</sup> Monroe Beardsley, 'The Aesthetic Point of View' in *The Aesthetic Point of View: Selected Essays*, p. 19.
- <sup>17</sup> Dabney Townsend, *Aesthetic Objects and Works of Art* , p. 262.
- <sup>18</sup> T.E. Jessop, 'The Objectivity of Aesthetic Value', in Hospers (ed.), *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*, pp. 278-280.
- <sup>19</sup> Allen Carlson, 'Appreciation and the Natural Environment' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 37(3): 267-275, Spring 1979.
- <sup>20</sup> Carlson, 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgement and Objectivity' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 40(1): 15-27, Fall 1981.
- <sup>21</sup> Carlson, and Barry Sadler, 'Environmental Aesthetics in Interdisciplinary Perspective' in Carlson and Sadler (eds.), *Environmental Aesthetics: Essays in Interpretation*



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- 22 Carlson, and Barry Sadler, 'Towards Models of Aesthetic Appreciation' in Carlson and Sadler (eds.), *Environmental Aesthetics*.
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- 24 Carlson, 'Saito on the Correct Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature' *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 20(2): 85-93, 1986.
- 25 Carlson, 'Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature' in Salim Kemal (ed.), *Nature, Landscape and Art* (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press, 1992). Pagination in text is Carlson's own manuscript pagination.
- 26 J.M. Moravcsik, 'Beauty in Art and Nature', *Philosophical Studies* 38 (1980), pp. 325-339, p. 336.
- 27 See Ernst Cassirer, 'Art' in Morris Weitz, ed., *Problems in Aesthetics : An Introduction* (Macmillan, 1959), p. 121, for one account of the difference between organic and aesthetic beauty.
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- 29 L. Duane Willard, 'On Preserving Nature's Aesthetic Features' *Environmental Ethics* 2(4): 293 - 310, Winter 1980, p. 299.
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- 33 Ibid., p. 41.
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- 36 Ibid., pp. 338-339.
- 37 Ibid., p. 343.
- 38 Ibid., p. 355.
- 39 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 4.
- 40 Hegel, *Introduction to his Aesthetics*, p. iv.
- 41 Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts', p. 71.
- 42 F. David Martin, 'Architecture and the Aesthetic Appreciation of the Natural Environment', p. 189.
- 43 Yrjo Sepanmaa, *The Beauty of Environment*, p. 79.

- 44 Neil Evernden, Review of Sepanmaa's *The Beauty of Environment* in *Environmental Ethics* 10(2): 183-186, Summer 1988.
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- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Saito, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, p. 261.
- 49 Evernden, p. 184.
- 50 Burke, *Enquiry into Origins of Sublime and beautiful*, p. 38.
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- 54 Jay Appleton, 'Landscape Aesthetics in the Field' in Appleton (ed.) *The Aesthetics of Landscape* ( Rural Planning Services, Ltd., 1980), p. 17.
- 55 Appleteton, 'Pleasure and Perception of Habitat' in Carlson and Sadler (eds.), *Environmental Aesthetics*, p. 43.
- 56 Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (John Wiley and Sons, 1975), p. viii.
- 57 Ibid., p. 69.
- 58 Ibid., p. 73.
- 59 Appleton, 'Pleasure and Perception of Habitat', p. 37. Also, see Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p. 169.
- 60 Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p. 172.
- 61 Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations* , p. 17.
- 62 Ibid., p. 28.
- 63 Ibid., p.22.
- 64 See Yi-Fu Tuan's marvellous essay on ice ans snow, deserts and oasis, in Kemal's forthcoming book *Nature, Landscape and Art*.

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